TULSIDAS

A contemporary of Shakespeare, Tulsidas (1532-1623) was known for singing the glory of Rama, the prince of Ayodhya. The *Ramcharitmanas*, Tulsidas' version of the Ramayana in Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi, consists of over 1,000 stanzas of about 12 to 18 lines each. Tulsi's words are musical and hypnotic. Every village and town in the Hindi heartland has a troupe that enacts the story of Rama based on Tulsidas's work.

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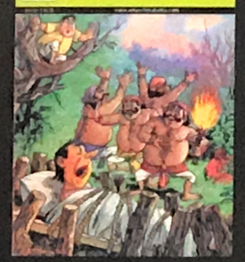

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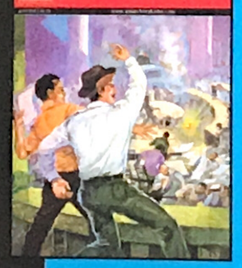

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TULSIDAS

THE POET WHO WROTE RAM-CHARIT-MANAS

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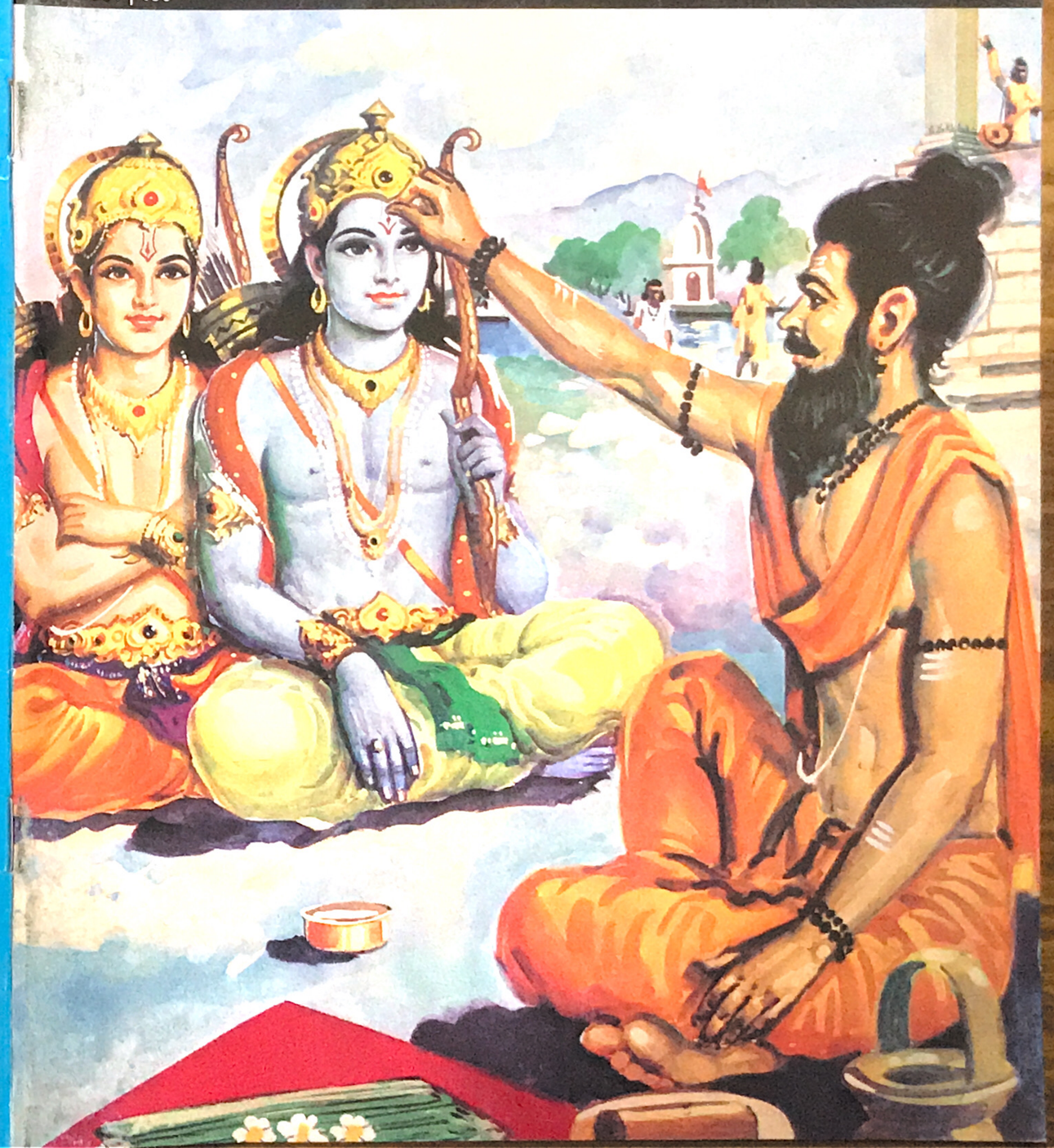
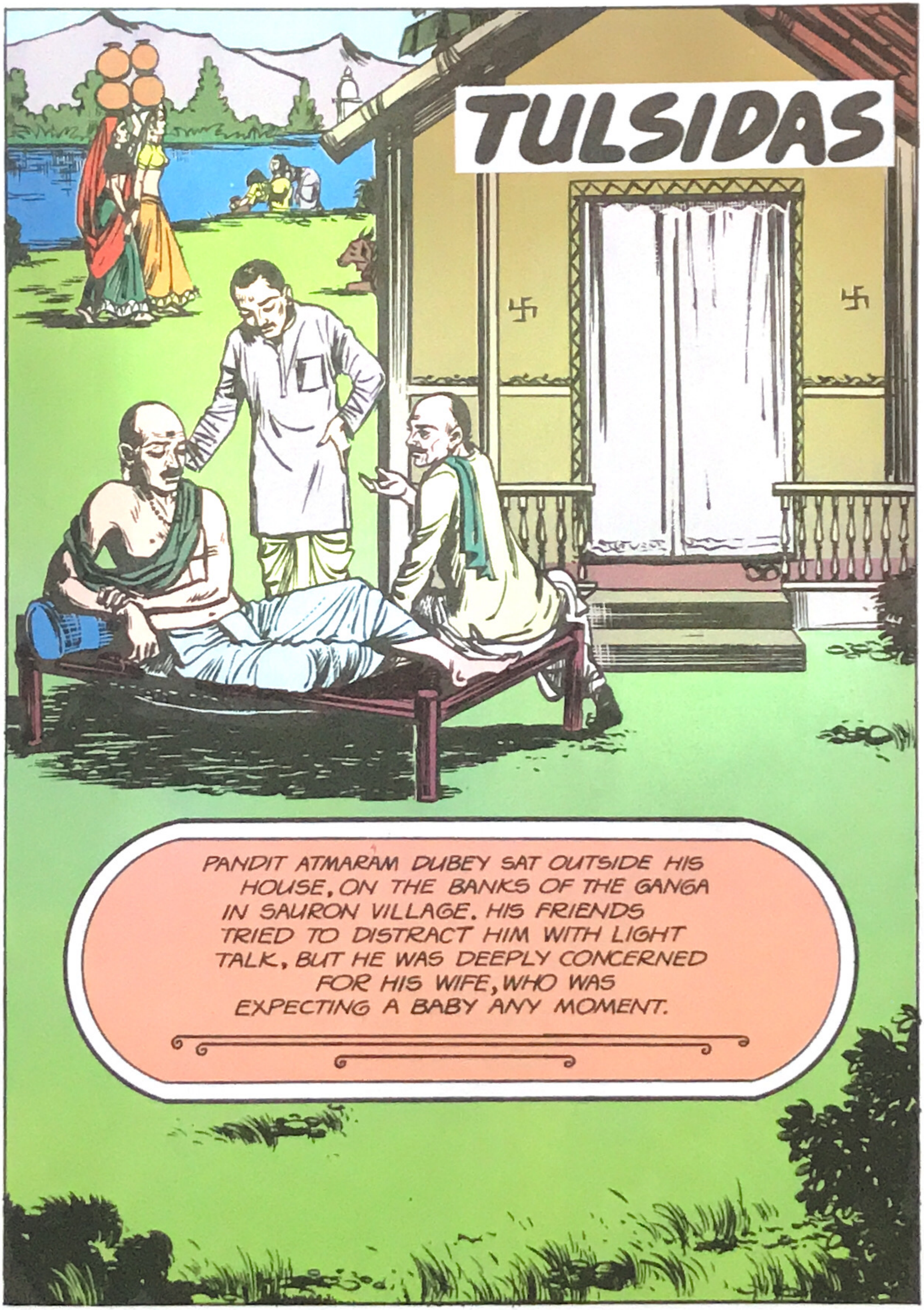
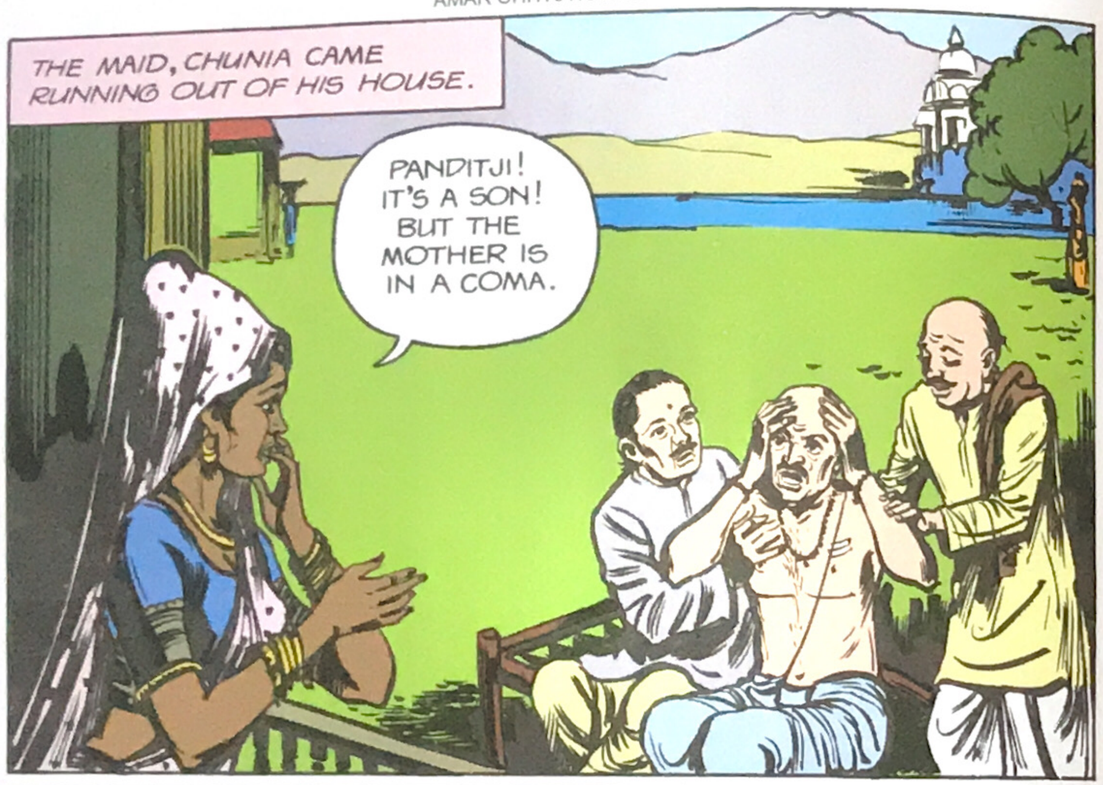
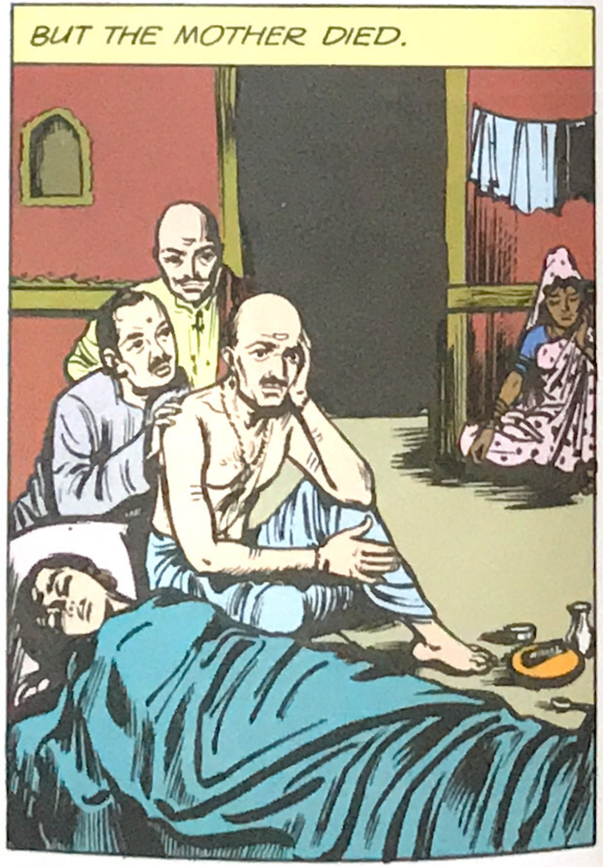



TULSIDAS
PANDIT ATMARAM DUBEY SAT OUTSIDE HIS HOUSE, ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGA IN SAURON VILLAGE. HIS FRIENDS TRIED TO DISTRACT HIM WITH LIGHT TALK, BUT HE WAS DEEPLY CONCERNED FOR HIS WIFE, WHO WAS EXPECTING A BABY ANY MOMENT.


THE MAID, CHUNIA CAME RUNNING OUT OF HIS HOUSE.
PANDITJI! IT'S A SON! BUT THE MOTHER IS IN A COMA.

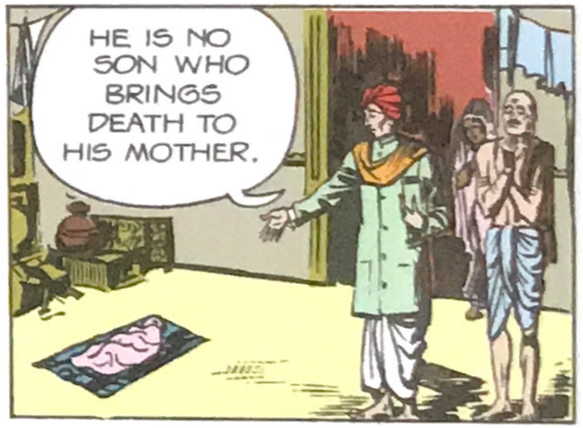
GOD, SAVE MY WIFE.
PANDITJI, YOU MUST NOT LOSE HEART. SHE WILL BE ALL RIGHT.


BUT THE MOTHER DIED.

AN ASTROLOGER WAS SUMMONED.

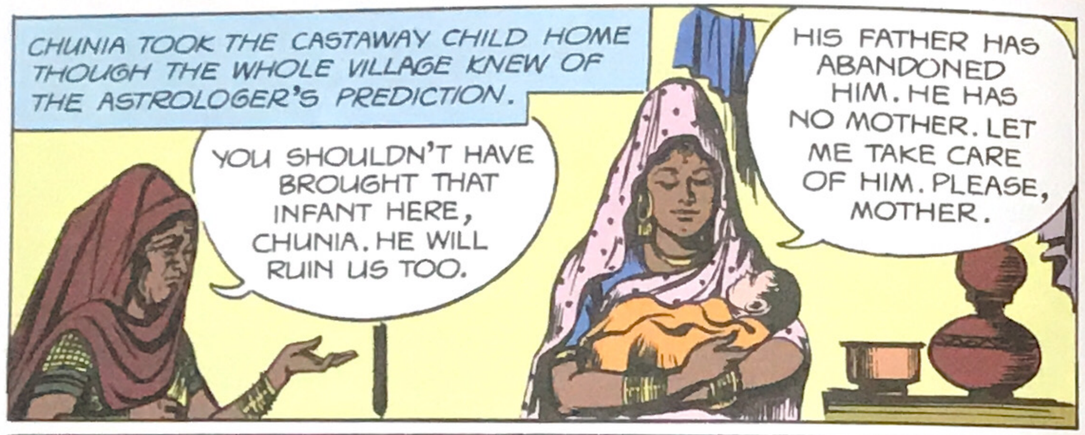
THIS CHILD BODES EVIL. HE WILL DESTROY THE ENTIRE FAMILY. ABANDON HIM.

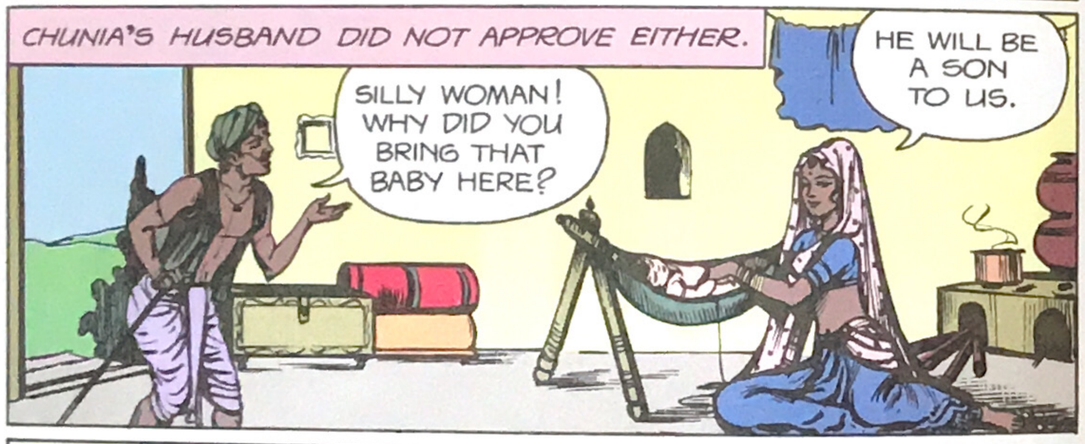
GIVE UP MY OWN SON?

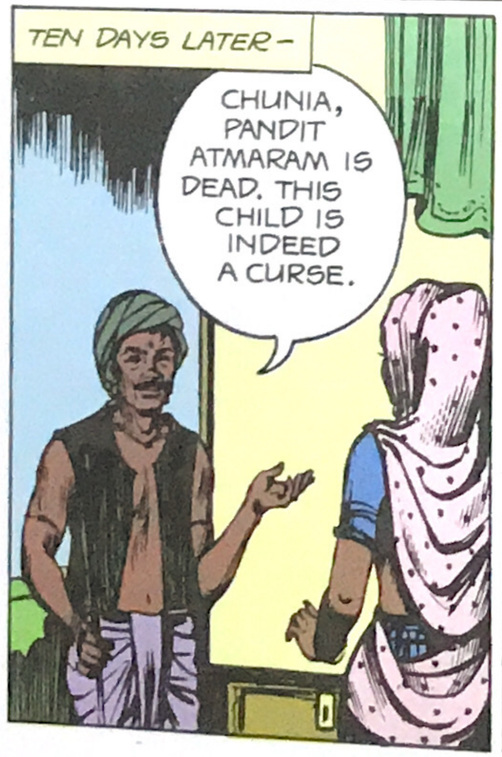

HE IS NO SON WHO BRINGS DEATH TO HIS MOTHER.

HE WILL RUIN YOU TOO. ABANDON HIM! NOW!

OH, NO! THE POOR INNOCENT BABY... I WILL NOT LET THAT HAPPEN.

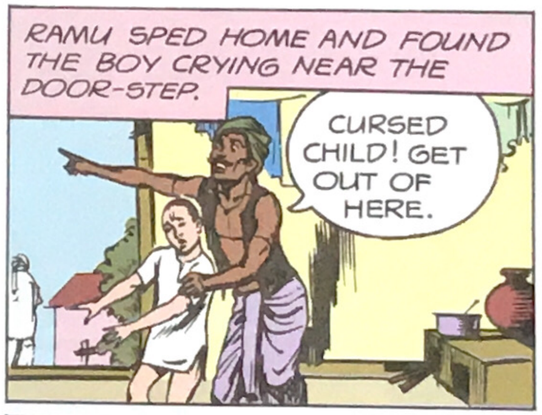

CHUNIA TOOK THE CASTAWAY CHILD HOME THOUGH THE WHOLE VILLAGE KNEW OF THE ASTROLOGER'S PREDICTION.
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT THAT INFANT HERE, CHUNIA. HE WILL RUIN US TOO.
HIS FATHER HAS ABANDONED HIM. HE HAS NO MOTHER. LET ME TAKE CARE OF HIM. PLEASE, MOTHER.

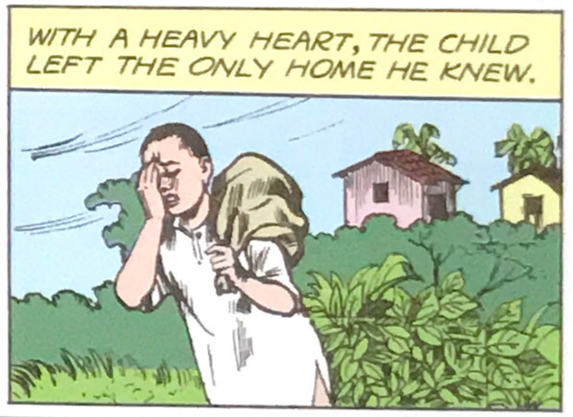

CHUNIA'S HUSBAND DID NOT APPROVE EITHER.
SILLY WOMAN! WHY DID YOU BRING THAT BABY HERE?
HE WILL BE A SON TO US.

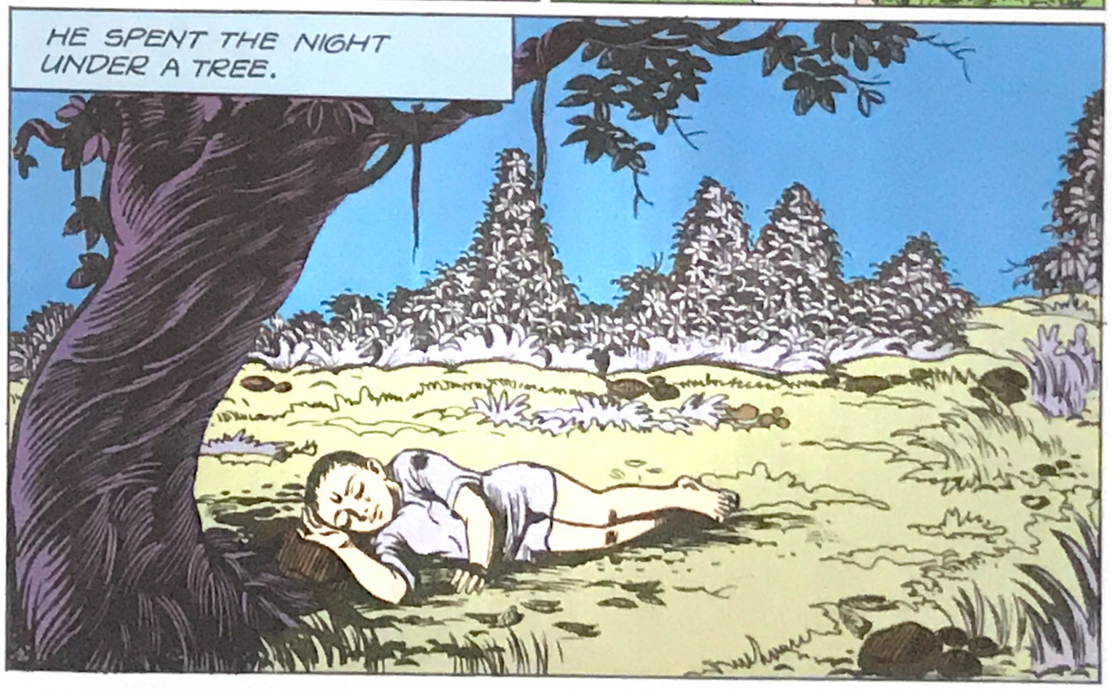

TEN DAYS LATER –
CHUNIA, PANDIT ATMARAM IS DEAD. THIS CHILD IS INDEED A CURSE.

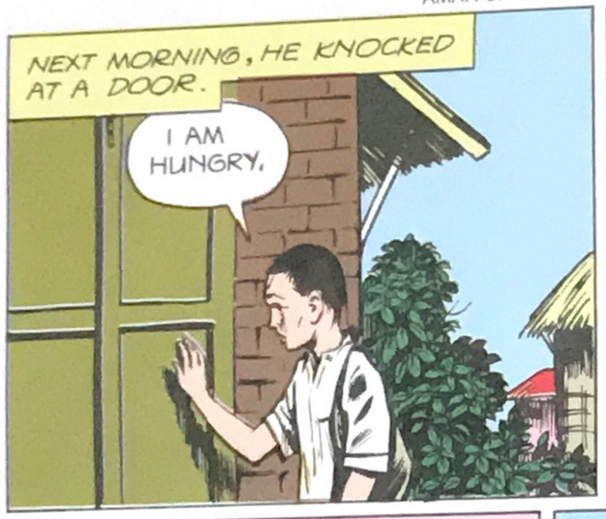
WHY BLAME AN INNOCENT CHILD?

CHUNIA DID NOT LIVE LONG TO TAKE CARE OF THE CHILD. ONE DAY WHEN THE BOY WAS ABOUT SEVEN YEARS OLD –
YOUR WIFE... SHE HAS BEEN BITTEN BY A SNAKE.

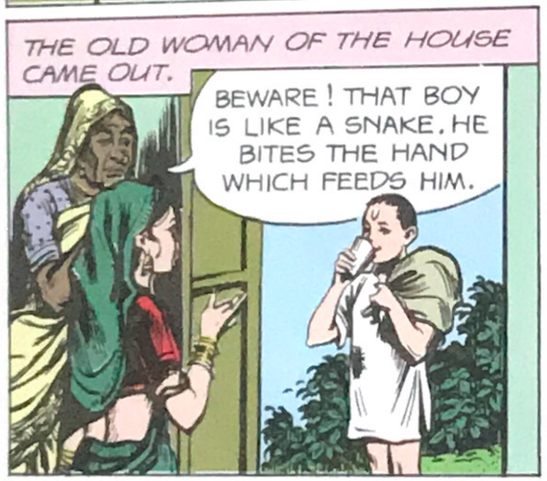

RAMU SPED HOME AND FOUND THE BOY CRYING NEAR THE DOOR-STEP.
CURSED CHILD! GET OUT OF HERE.


WITH A HEAVY HEART, THE CHILD LEFT THE ONLY HOME HE KNEW.

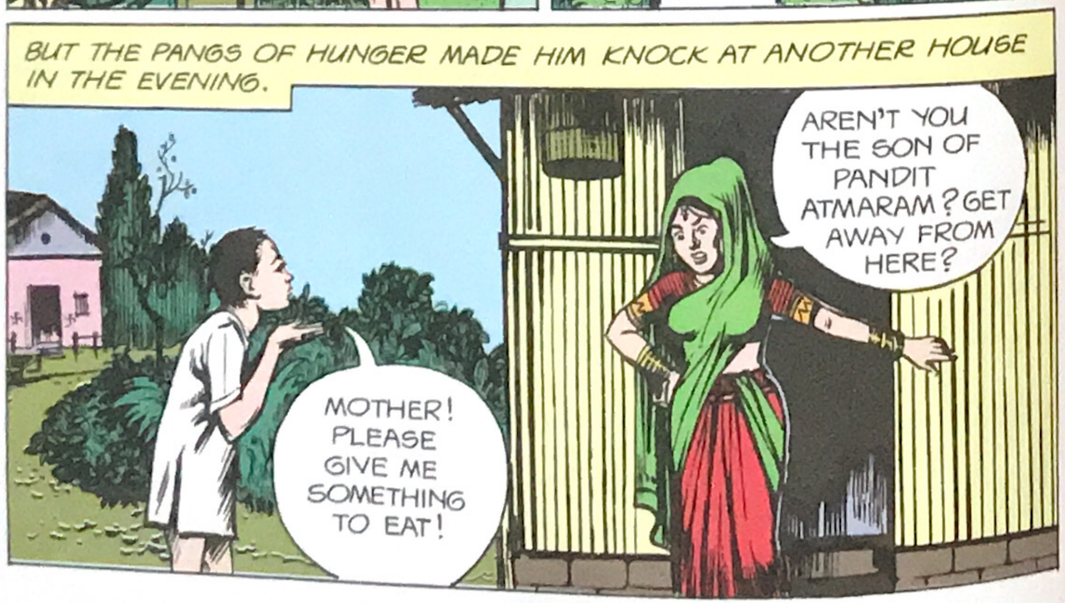

HE SPENT THE NIGHT UNDER A TREE.


NEXT MORNING, HE KNOCKED AT A DOOR.
I AM HUNGRY.

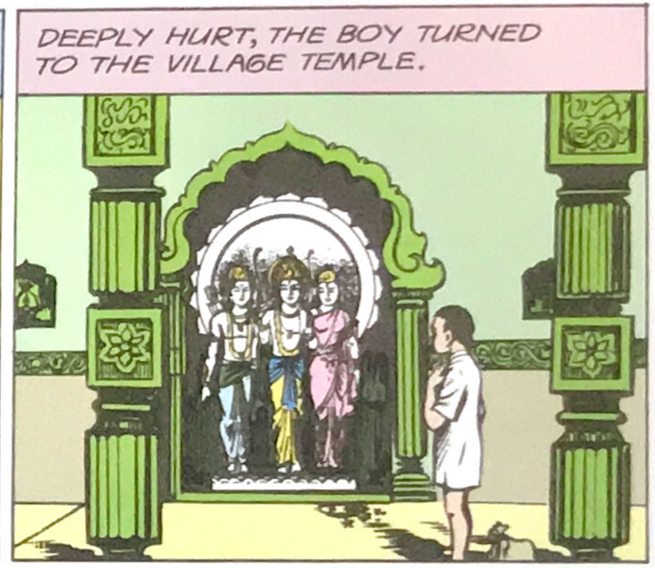
WAIT, I'LL GIVE YOU SOME MILK.

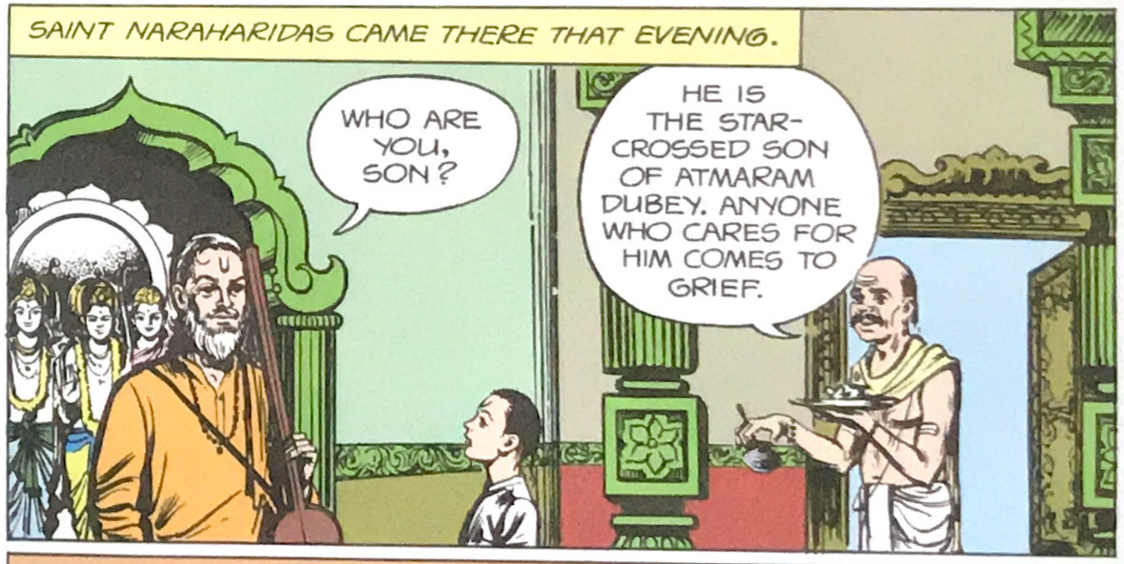

THE OLD WOMAN OF THE HOUSE CAME OUT.
BEWARE! THAT BOY IS LIKE A SNAKE. HE BITES THE HAND WHICH FEEDS HIM.

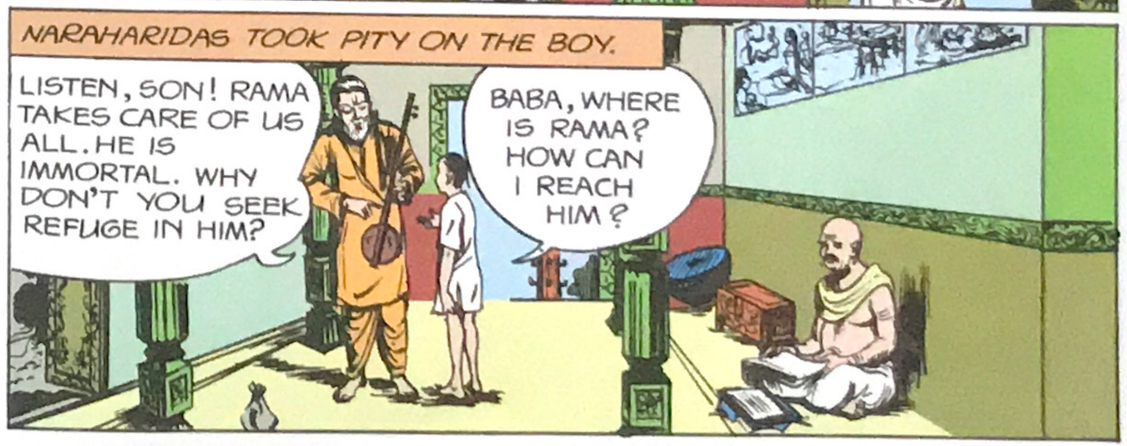
NO. I MUST NEVER BEG AGAIN!


BUT THE PANGS OF HUNGER MADE HIM KNOCK AT ANOTHER HOUSE IN THE EVENING.
MOTHER! PLEASE GIVE ME SOMETHING TO EAT!
AREN'T YOU THE SON OF PANDIT ATMARAM? GET AWAY FROM HERE?

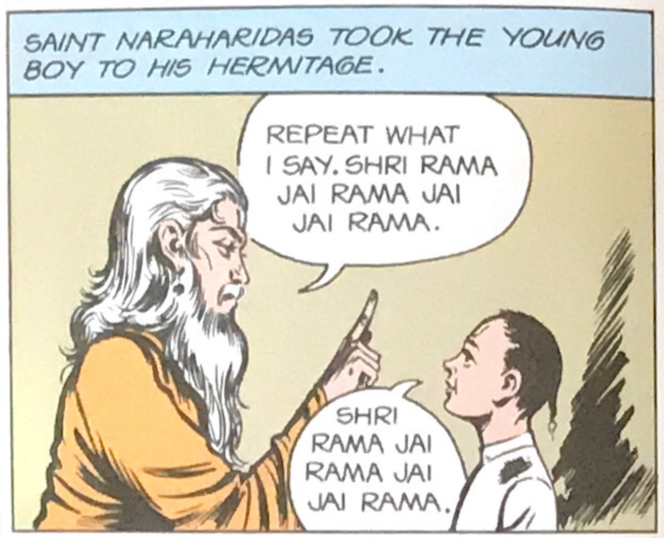
THE DOOR CLOSED ON HIS FACE.

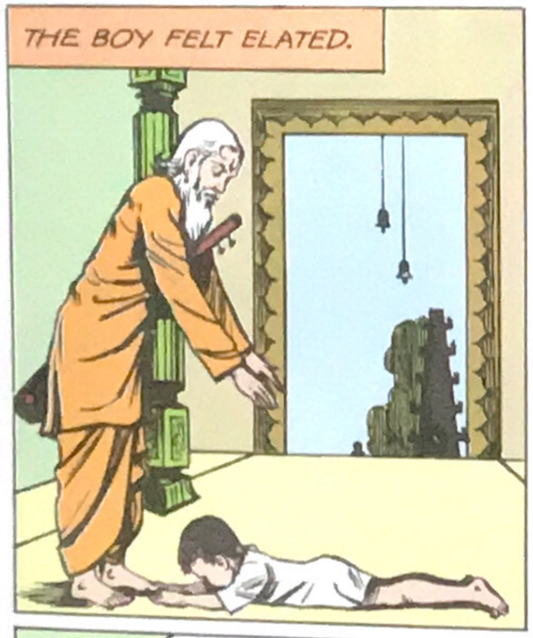

DEEPLY HURT, THE BOY TURNED TO THE VILLAGE TEMPLE.


SAINT NARAHARIDAS CAME THERE THAT EVENING.
WHO ARE YOU, SON?
HE IS THE STAR-CROSSED SON OF ATMARAM DUBEY. ANYONE WHO CARES FOR HIM COMES TO GRIEF.

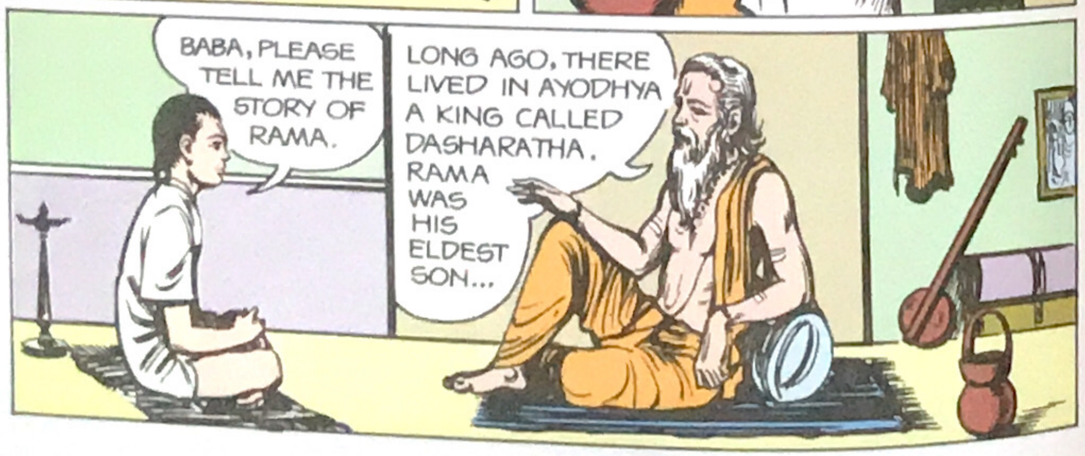

NARAHARIDAS TOOK PITY ON THE BOY.
LISTEN, SON! RAMA TAKES CARE OF US ALL. HE IS IMMORTAL. WHY DON'T YOU SEEK REFUGE IN HIM?
BABA, WHERE IS RAMA? HOW CAN I REACH HIM?

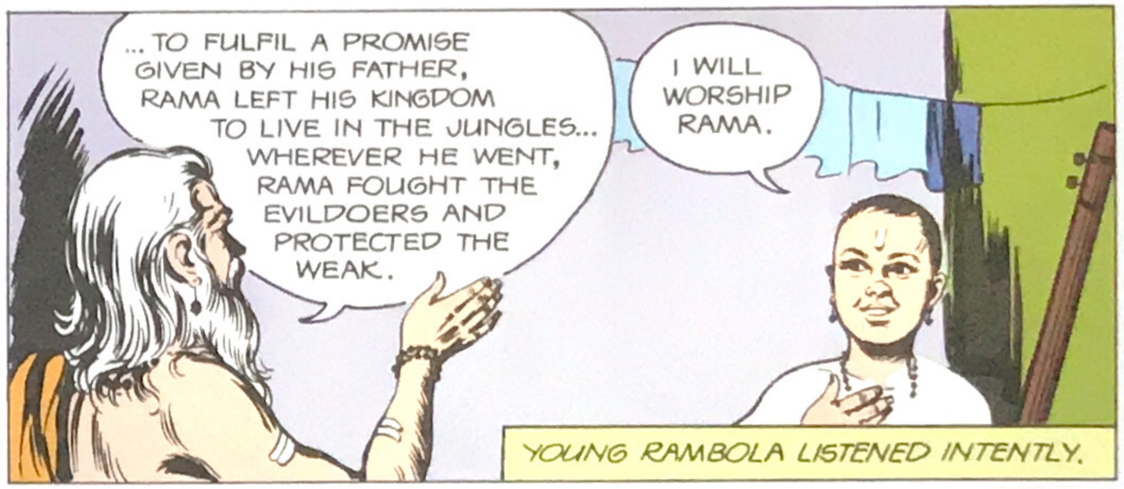
COME WITH ME.

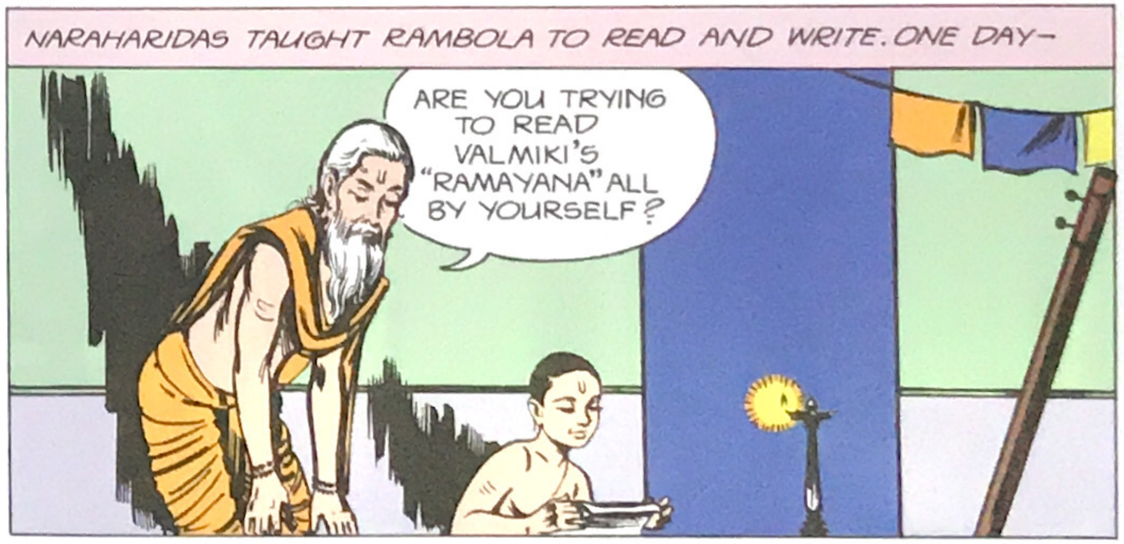

SAINT NARAHARIDAS TOOK THE YOUNG BOY TO HIS HERMITAGE.
REPEAT WHAT I SAY. SHRI RAMA JAI RAMA JAI JAI RAMA.
SHRI RAMA JAI RAMA JAI JAI RAMA.

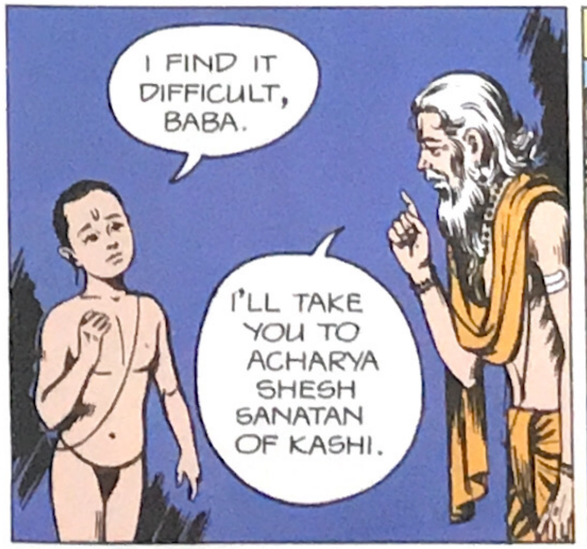

THE BOY FELT ELATED.

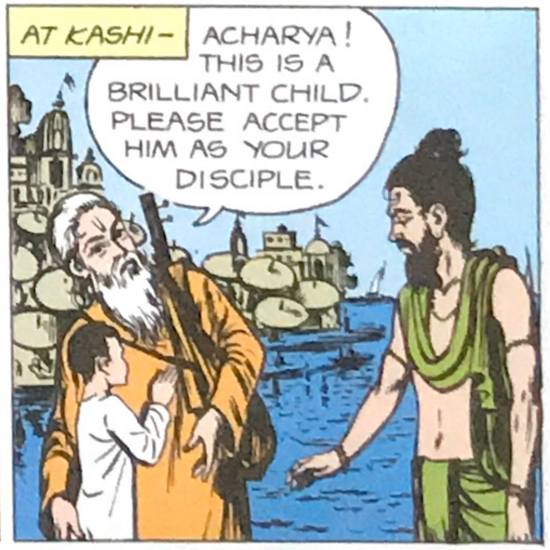
FROM TODAY, YOU WILL BE KNOWN AS RAMBOLA.

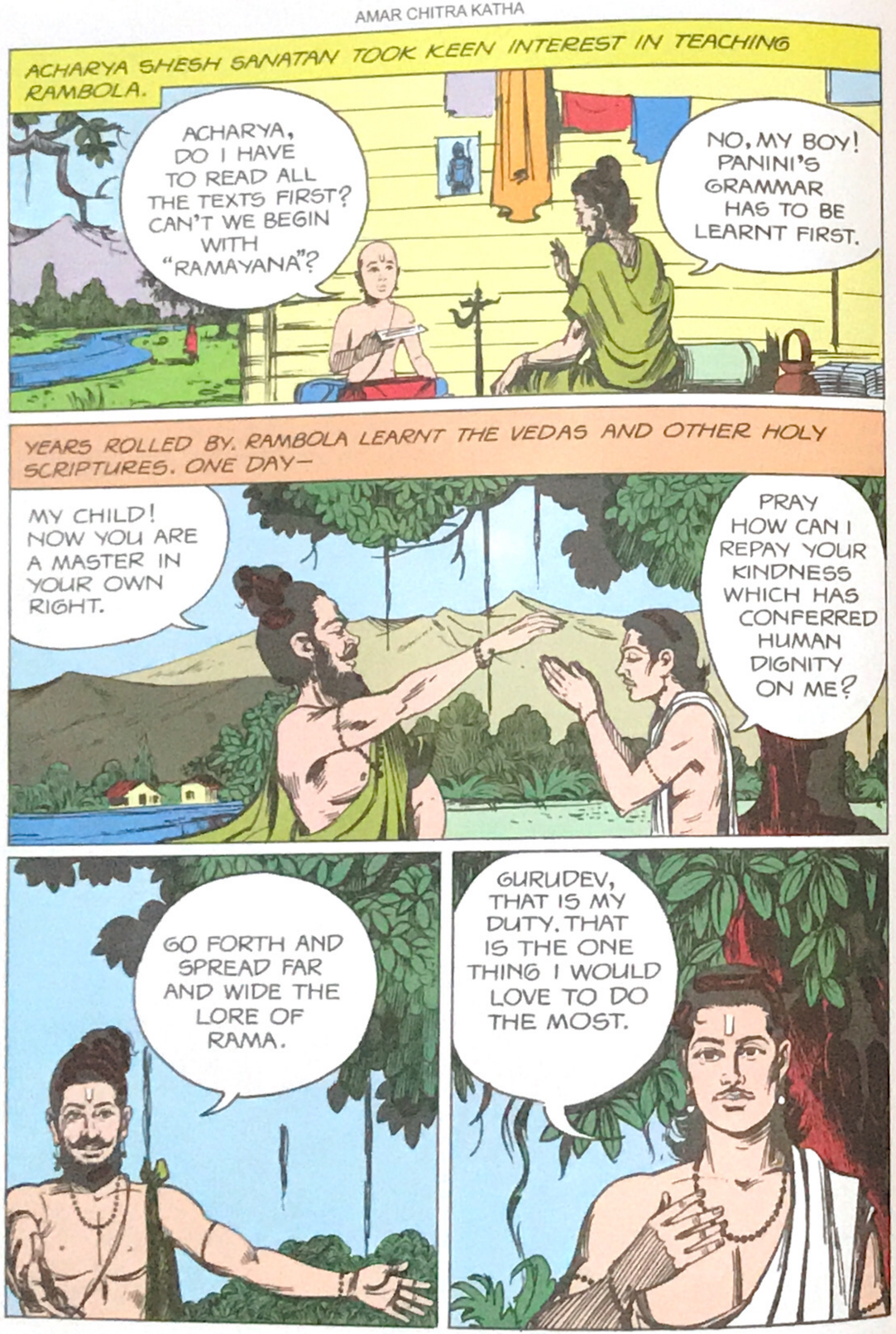

BABA, PLEASE TELL ME THE STORY OF RAMA.
LONG AGO, THERE LIVED IN AYODHYA A KING CALLED DASHARATHA. RAMA WAS HIS ELDEST SON...

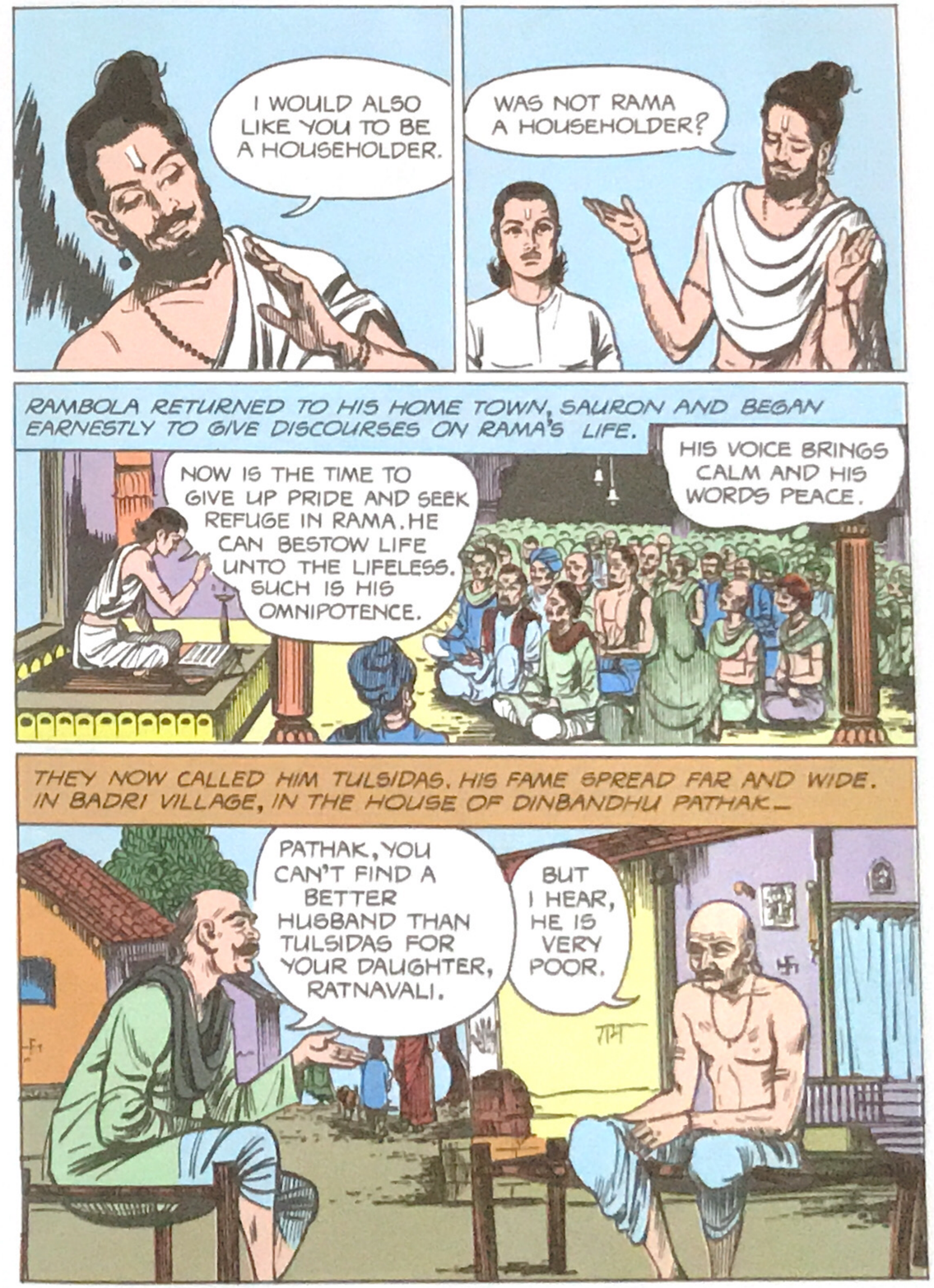

...TO FULFIL A PROMISE GIVEN BY HIS FATHER, RAMA LEFT HIS KINGDOM TO LIVE IN THE JUNGLES... WHEREVER HE WENT, RAMA FOUGHT THE EVILDOERS AND PROTECTED THE WEAK.
I WILL WORSHIP RAMA.
YOUNG RAMBOLA LISTENED INTENTLY.

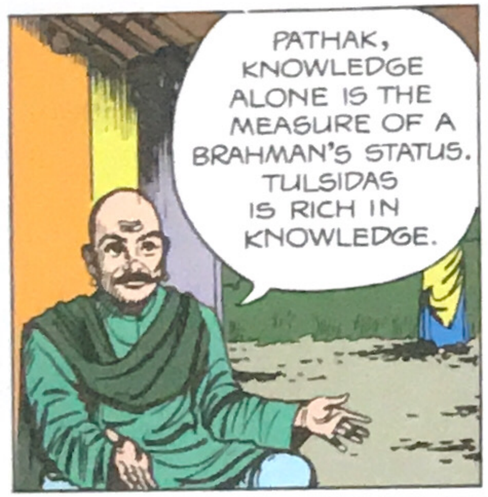

NARAHARIDAS TAUGHT RAMBOLA TO READ AND WRITE. ONE DAY–
ARE YOU TRYING TO READ VALMIKI'S "RAMAYANA" ALL BY YOURSELF?


I FIND IT DIFFICULT, BABA.
I'LL TAKE YOU TO ACHARYA SHESH SANATAN OF KASHI.

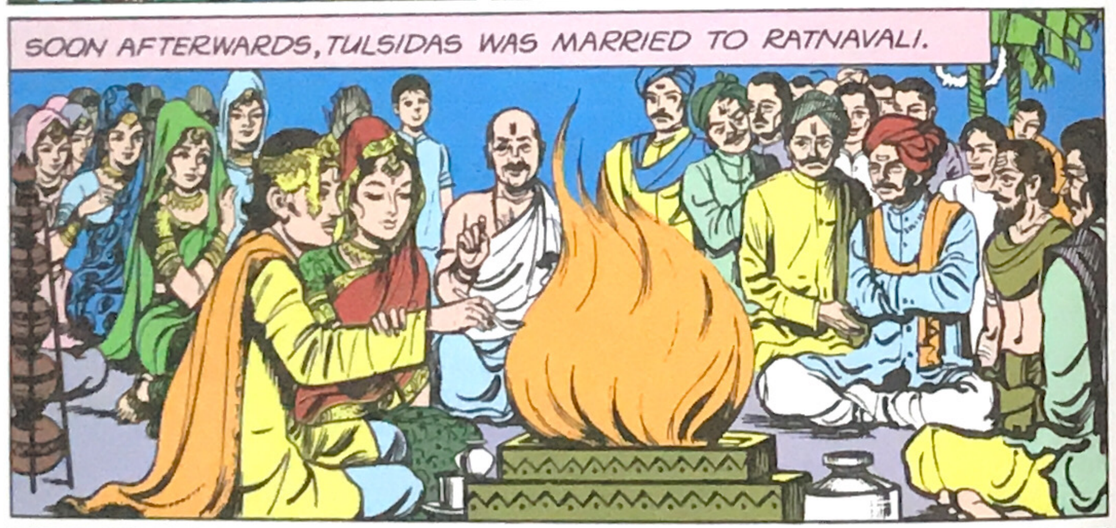

AT KASHI–
ACHARYA! THIS IS A BRILLIANT CHILD. PLEASE ACCEPT HIM AS YOUR DISCIPLE.

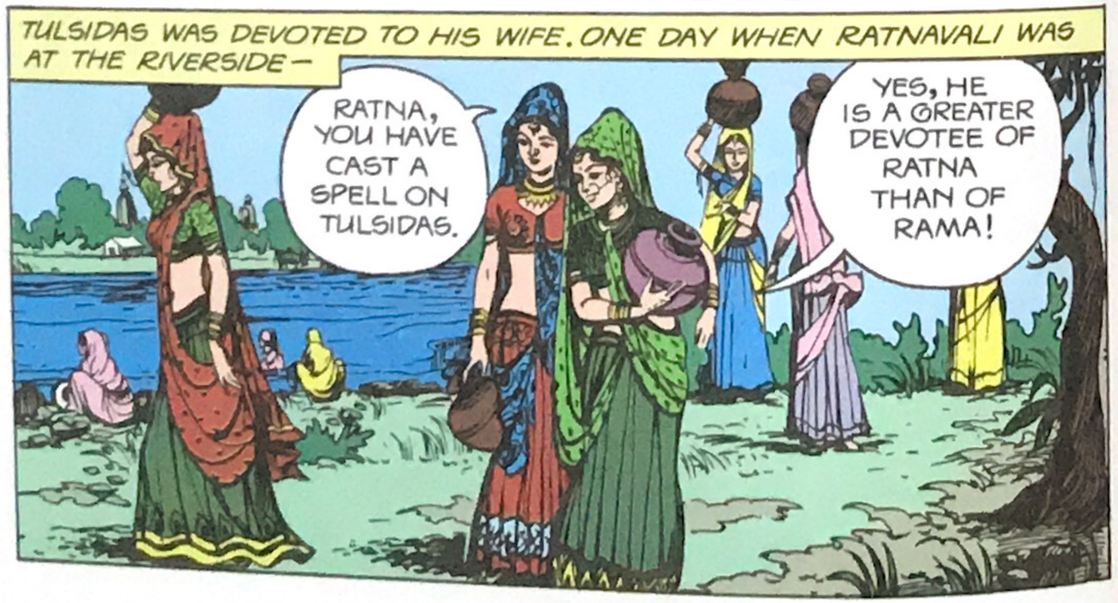

ACHARYA SHESH SANATAN TOOK KEEN INTEREST IN TEACHING RAMBOLA.
ACHARYA, DO I HAVE TO READ ALL THE TEXTS FIRST? CAN'T WE BEGIN WITH "RAMAYANA"?
NO, MY BOY! PANINI'S GRAMMAR HAS TO BE LEARNT FIRST.
YEARS ROLLED BY. RAMBOLA LEARNT THE VEDAS AND OTHER HOLY SCRIPTURES. ONE DAY–
MY CHILD! NOW YOU ARE A MASTER IN YOUR OWN RIGHT.
PRAY HOW CAN I REPAY YOUR KINDNESS WHICH HAS CONFERRED HUMAN DIGNITY ON ME?
GO FORTH AND SPREAD FAR AND WIDE THE LORE OF RAMA.
GURUDEV, THAT IS MY DUTY. THAT IS THE ONE THING I WOULD LOVE TO DO THE MOST.


I WOULD ALSO LIKE YOU TO BE A HOUSEHOLDER.
WAS NOT RAMA A HOUSEHOLDER?
RAMBOLA RETURNED TO HIS HOME TOWN, SAURON AND BEGAN EARNESTLY TO GIVE DISCOURSES ON RAMA'S LIFE.
NOW IS THE TIME TO GIVE UP PRIDE AND SEEK REFUGE IN RAMA. HE CAN BESTOW LIFE UNTO THE LIFELESS. SUCH IS HIS OMNIPOTENCE.
HIS VOICE BRINGS CALM AND HIS WORDS PEACE.
THEY NOW CALLED HIM TULSIDAS. HIS FAME SPREAD FAR AND WIDE. IN BADRI VILLAGE, IN THE HOUSE OF DINBANDHU PATHAK–
PATHAK, YOU CAN'T FIND A BETTER HUSBAND THAN TULSIDAS FOR YOUR DAUGHTER, RATNAVALI.
BUT I HEAR, HE IS VERY POOR.

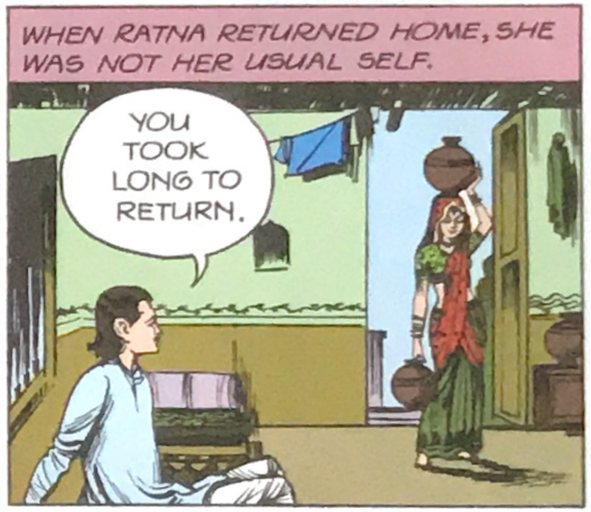

PATHAK, KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS THE MEASURE OF A BRAHMAN'S STATUS. TULSIDAS IS RICH IN KNOWLEDGE.

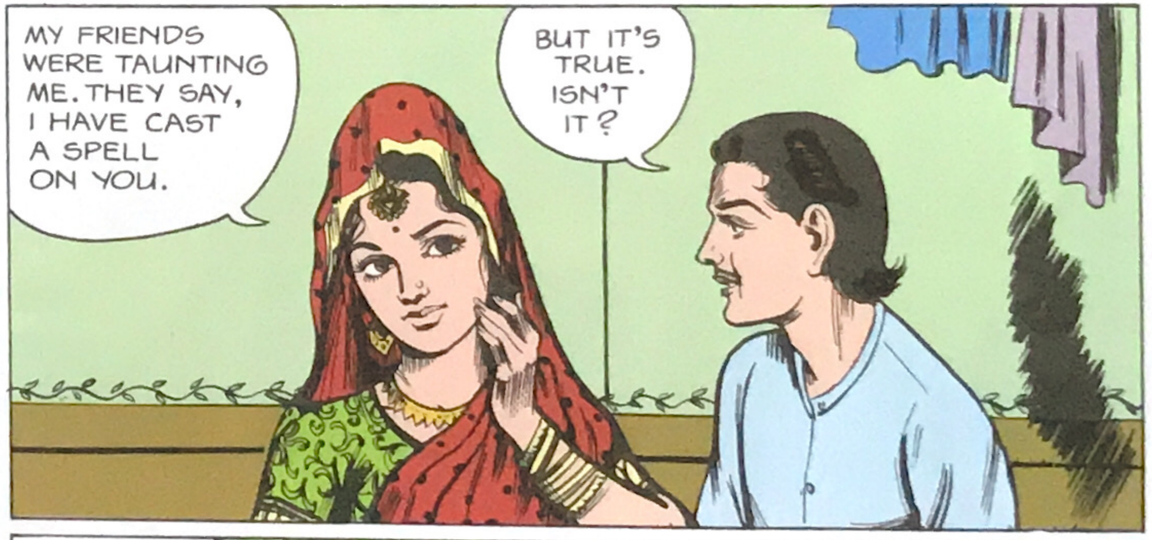
WELL, THEN PLEASE GO TO SAURON AND TALK TO HIM ON THIS TOPIC.

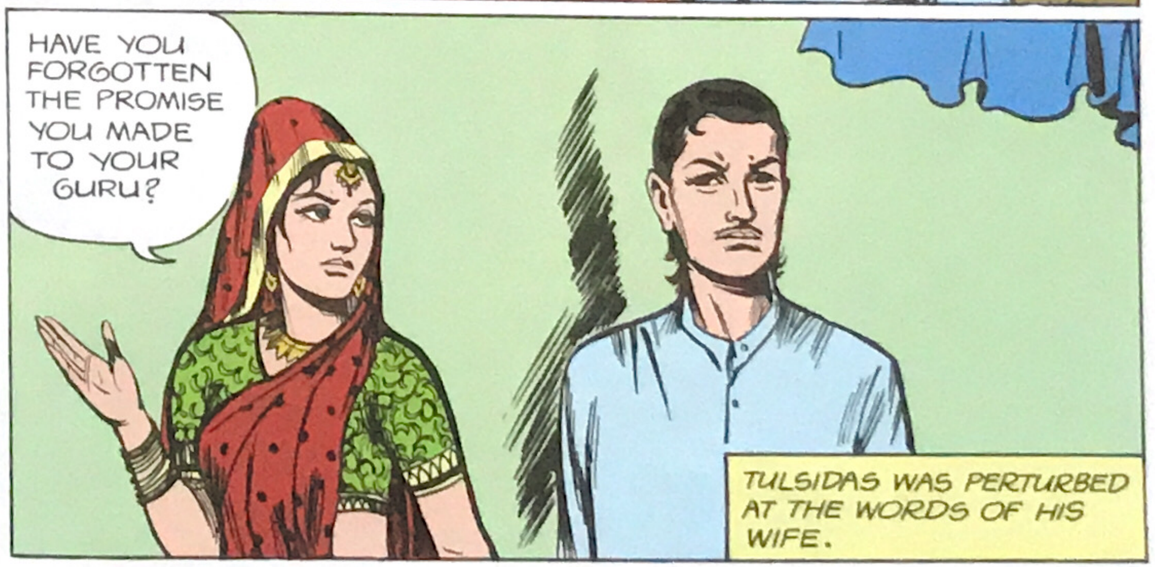

SOON AFTERWARDS, TULSIDAS WAS MARRIED TO RATNAVALI.


TULSIDAS WAS DEVOTED TO HIS WIFE. ONE DAY WHEN RATNAVALI WAS AT THE RIVERSIDE—
RATNA, YOU HAVE CAST A SPELL ON TULSIDAS.
YES, HE IS A GREATER DEVOTEE OF RATNA THAN OF RAMA!

HOW DID YOU DO IT? TELL US, WON'T YOU?
PLEASE DON'T HARASS ME THUS.


WHEN RATNA RETURNED HOME, SHE WAS NOT HER USUAL SELF.
YOU TOOK LONG TO RETURN.


MY FRIENDS WERE TAUNTING ME. THEY SAY, I HAVE CAST A SPELL ON YOU.
BUT IT'S TRUE. ISN'T IT?


HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE PROMISE YOU MADE TO YOUR GURU?
TULSIDAS WAS PERTURBED AT THE WORDS OF HIS WIFE.

A FEW DAYS LATER, ANANTA, A BARBER FROM BADRI VILLAGE, CAME TO THEIR HOUSE.

YOUR FATHER HAS SENT ME TO FETCH YOU, CHILD.

I CANNOT COME. MY HUSBAND IS AWAY. HE WILL RETURN AFTER A DAY OR TWO.

TOMORROW IS THE RAAKHI FESTIVAL. NONE AT HOME WOULD LIKE TO MISS YOU THEN.

ALL RIGHT. I WILL COME WITH YOU.

BUT FIRST, I MUST LEAVE A NOTE FOR HIM.

WHEN TULSIDAS RETURNED HOME, HE FELT UNHAPPY TO FIND RATNA GONE. THEN HE SAW THE NOTE.

SHE SAYS SHE WILL BE BACK SOON. BUT HOW CAN I WAIT TILL THEN?

HE RUSHED OUT OF THE HOUSE...

...AND REACHED THE RIVER BANK.

PLEASE TAKE ME ACROSS.

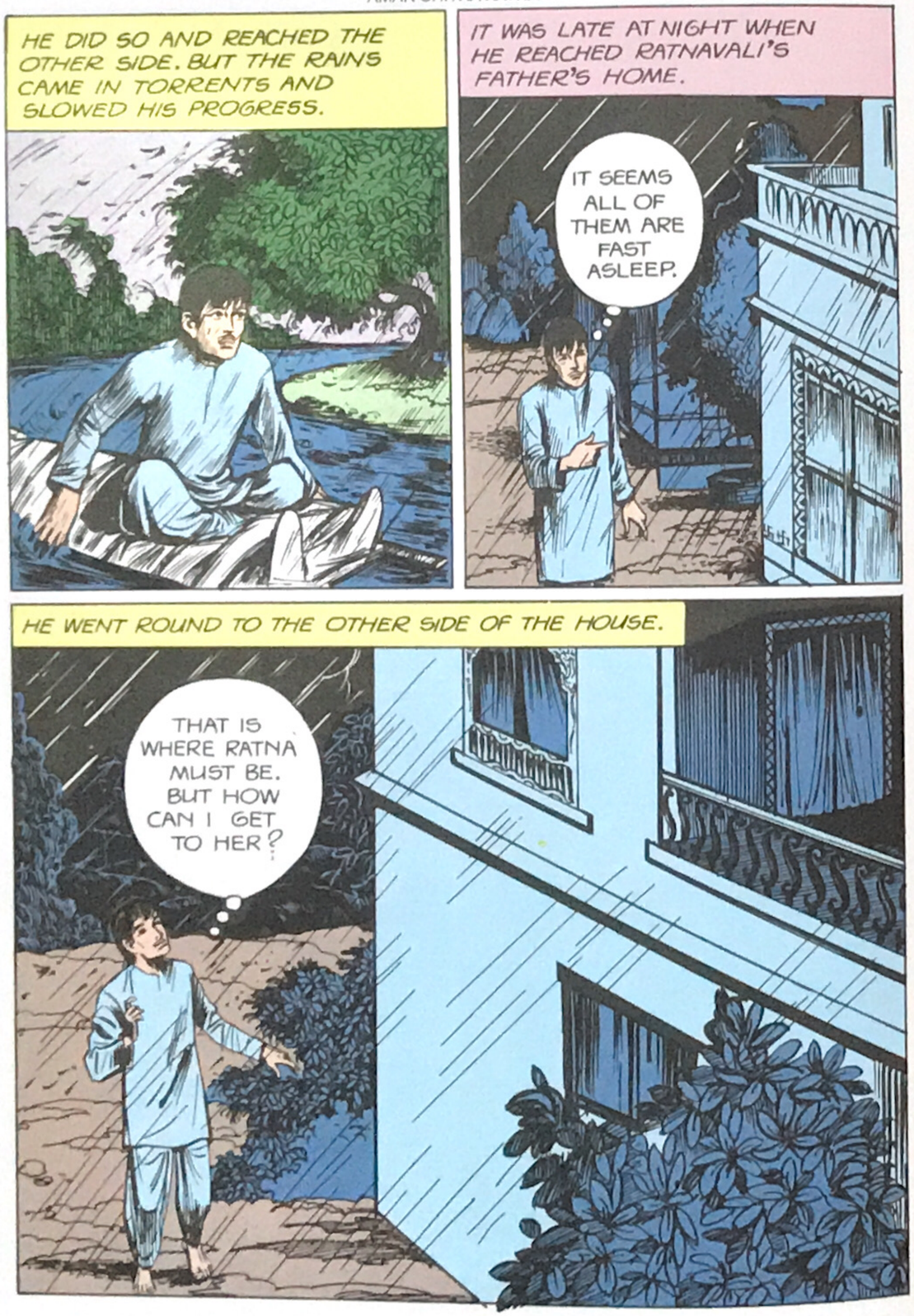
ARE YOU MAD? THE RIVER IS IN SPATE.

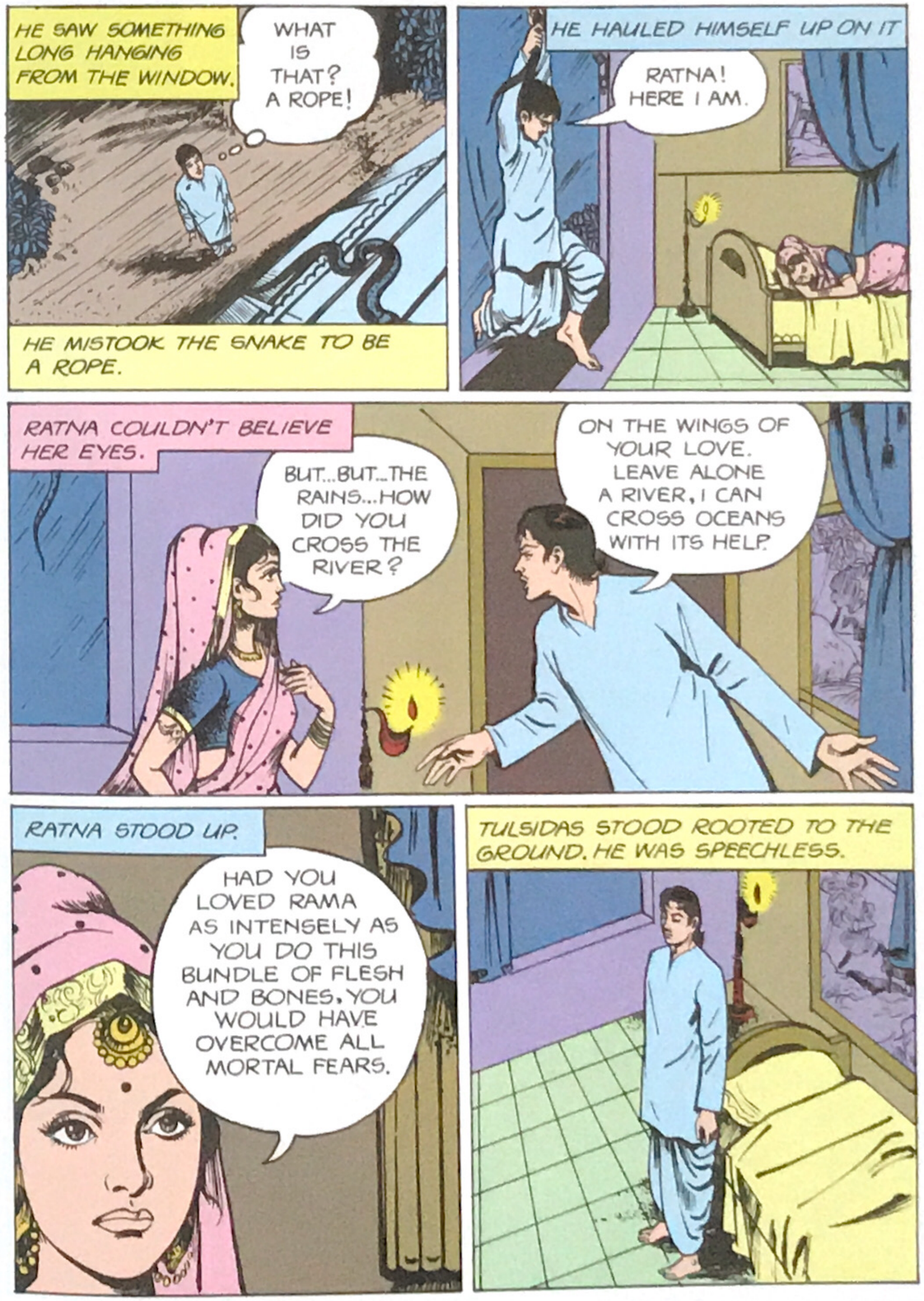
HE RETRACED HIS STEPS AND STARTED WALKING ALONG THE RIVER BANK.

I CAN'T GO HOME. I FEEL SO MISERABLE.

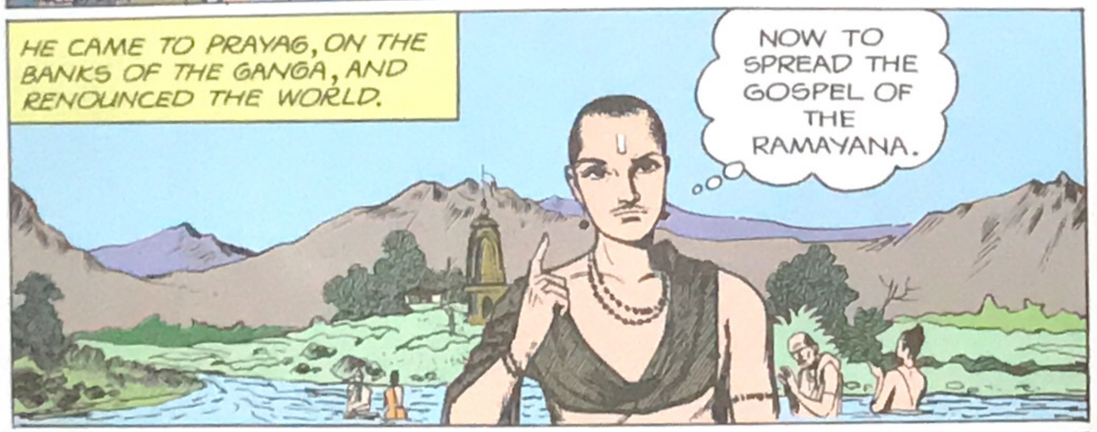
JUST THEN, HE SAW A DEAD BODY FLOATING ON THE RIVER.

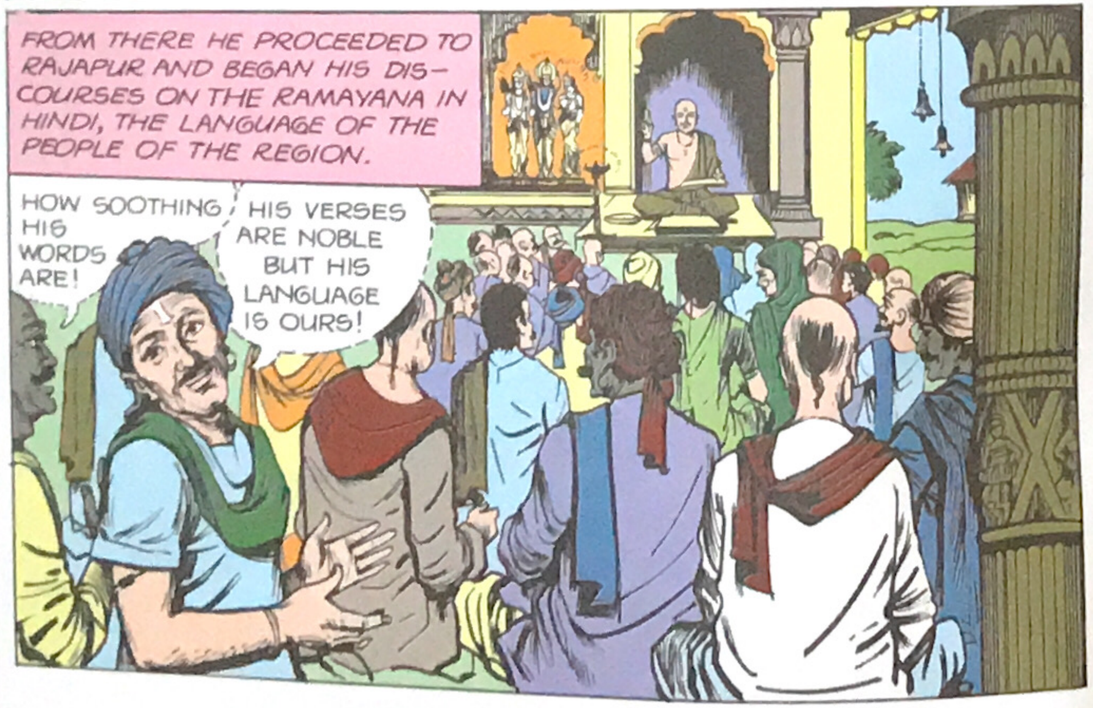
I CAN USE THAT TO CROSS THE RIVER.

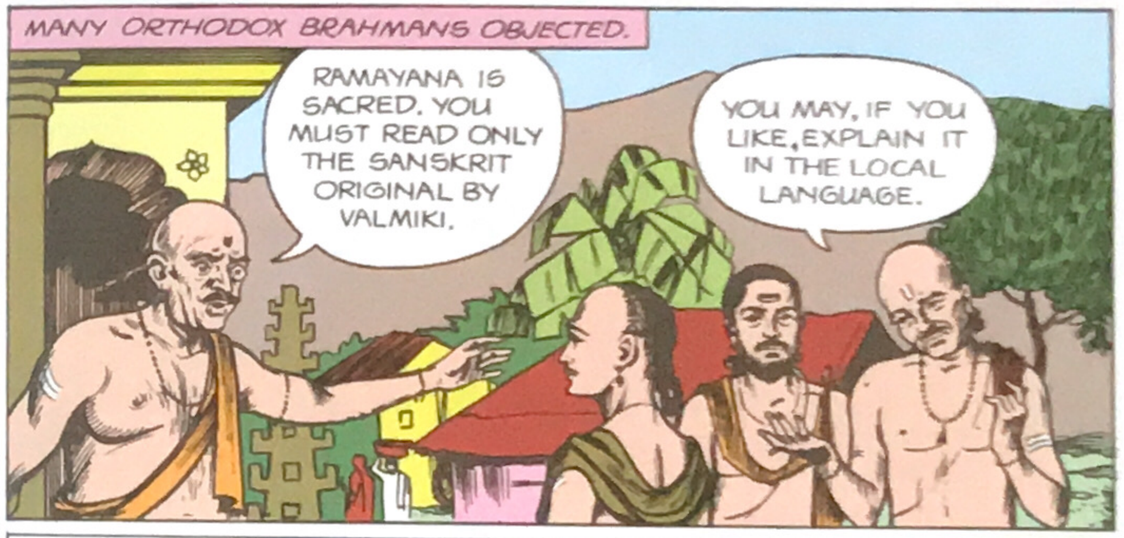

HE DID SO AND REACHED THE OTHER SIDE. BUT THE RAINS CAME IN TORRENTS AND SLOWED HIS PROGRESS.
IT WAS LATE AT NIGHT WHEN HE REACHED RATNAVALI'S FATHER'S HOME.
IT SEEMS ALL OF THEM ARE FAST ASLEEP.
HE WENT ROUND TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HOUSE.
THAT IS WHERE RATNA MUST BE. BUT HOW CAN I GET TO HER?

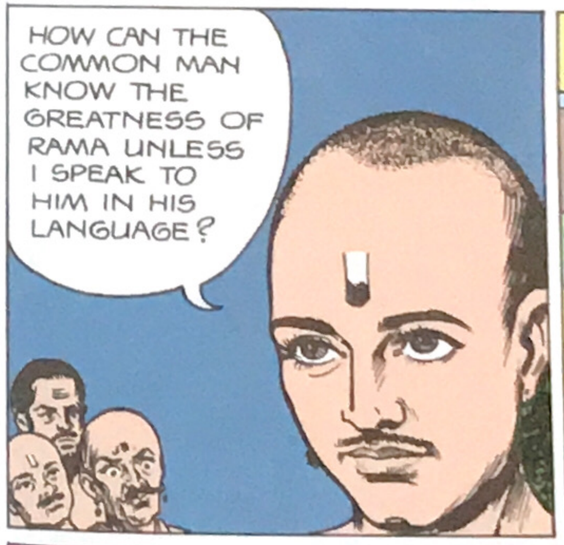

HE SAW SOMETHING LONG HANGING FROM THE WINDOW.
WHAT IS THAT? A ROPE!
HE MISTOOK THE SNAKE TO BE A ROPE.
HE HAULED HIMSELF UP ON IT
RATNA! HERE I AM.
RATNA COULDN'T BELIEVE HER EYES.
BUT...BUT...THE RAINS...HOW DID YOU CROSS THE RIVER?
ON THE WINGS OF YOUR LOVE. LEAVE ALONE A RIVER, I CAN CROSS OCEANS WITH ITS HELP.
RATNA STOOD UP.
HAD YOU LOVED RAMA AS INTENSELY AS YOU DO THIS BUNDLE OF FLESH AND BONES, YOU WOULD HAVE OVERCOME ALL MORTAL FEARS.
TULSIDAS STOOD ROOTED TO THE GROUND. HE WAS SPEECHLESS.

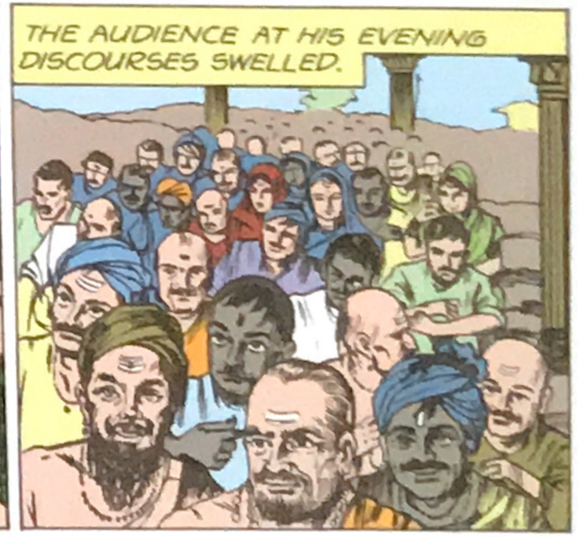
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TULSIDAS DID NOT LOOK BACK.

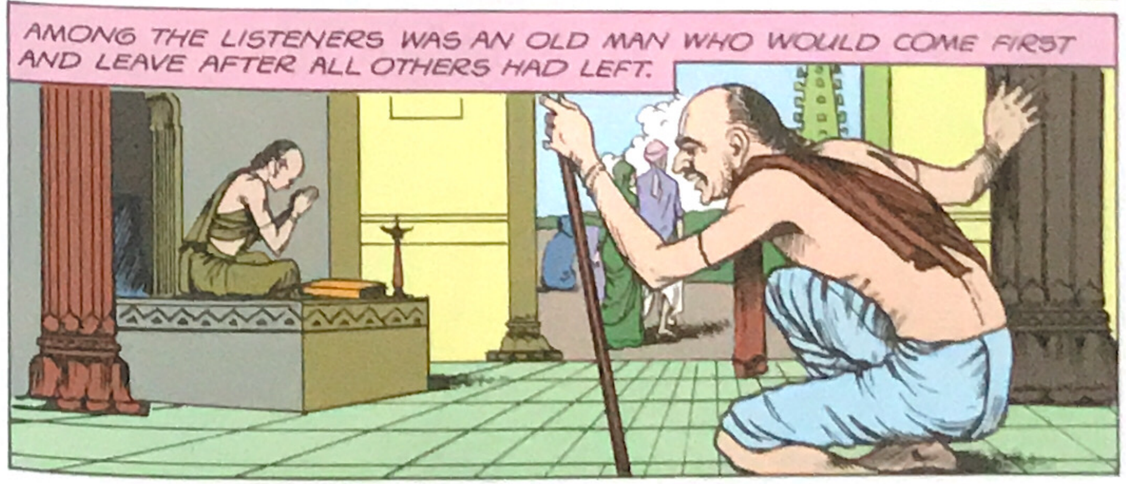

HE CAME TO PRAYAG, ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGA, AND RENOUNCED THE WORLD.
NOW TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL OF THE RAMAYANA.

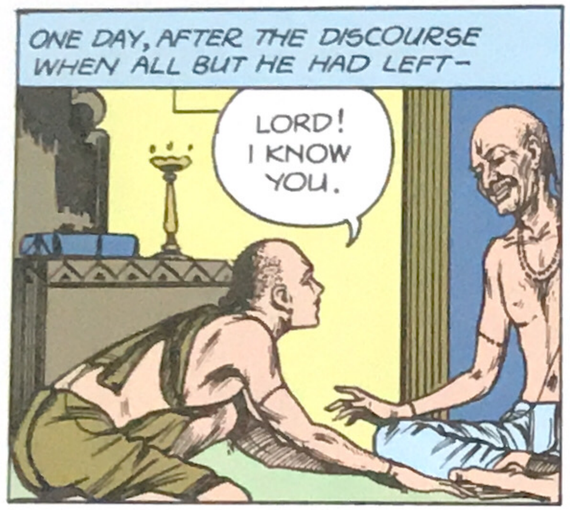

FROM THERE HE PROCEEDED TO RAJAPUR AND BEGAN HIS DISCOURSES ON THE RAMAYANA IN HINDI, THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION.
HOW SOOTHING HIS WORDS ARE!
HIS VERSES ARE NOBLE BUT HIS LANGUAGE IS OURS!

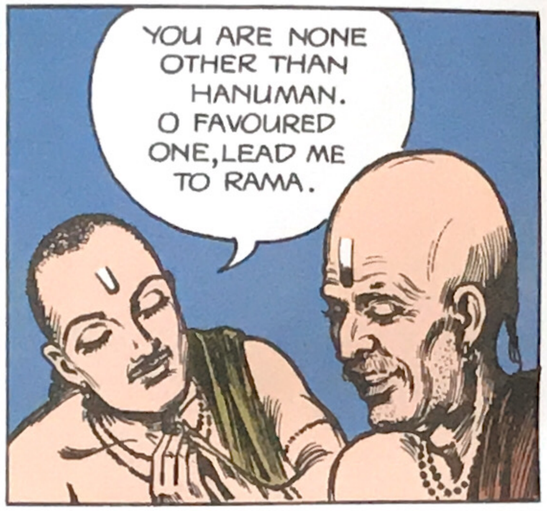

MANY ORTHODOX BRAHMANS OBJECTED.
RAMAYANA IS SACRED. YOU MUST READ ONLY THE SANSKRIT ORIGINAL BY VALMIKI.
YOU MAY, IF YOU LIKE, EXPLAIN IT IN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE.

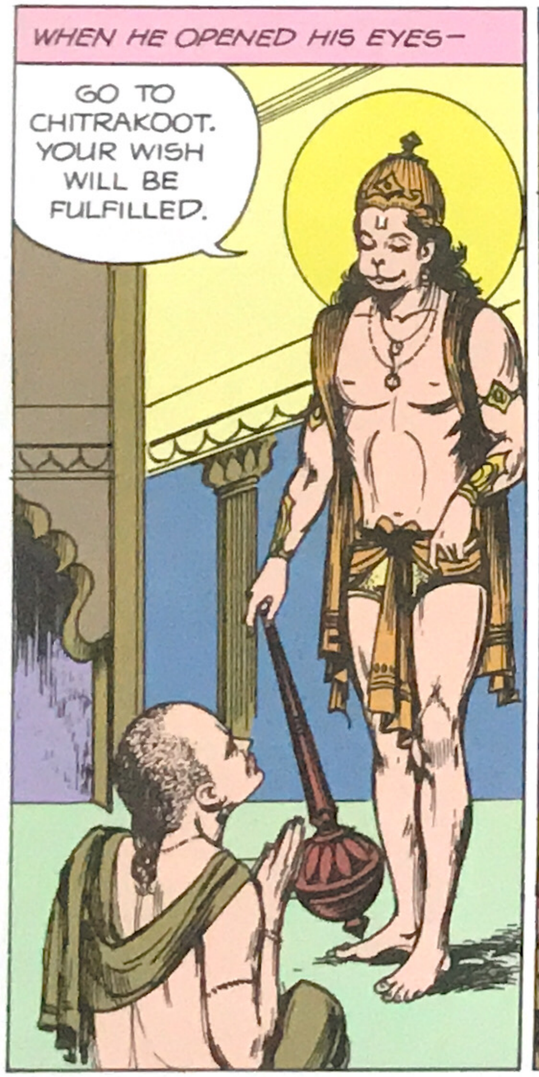

HOW CAN THE COMMON MAN KNOW THE GREATNESS OF RAMA UNLESS I SPEAK TO HIM IN HIS LANGUAGE?

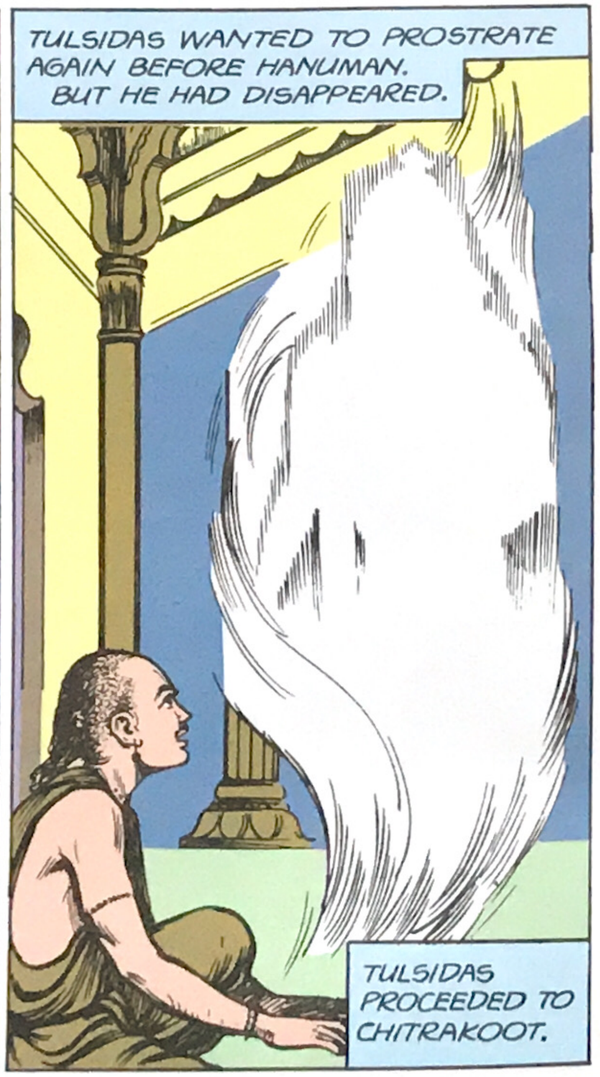

THE AUDIENCE AT HIS EVENING DISCOURSES SWELLED.

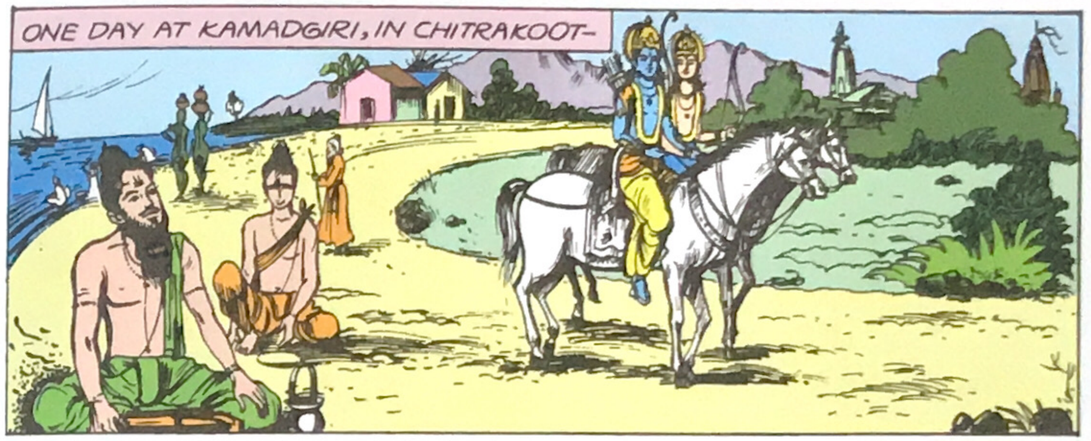

AMONG THE LISTENERS WAS AN OLD MAN WHO WOULD COME FIRST AND LEAVE AFTER ALL OTHERS HAD LEFT.


ONE DAY, AFTER THE DISCOURSE WHEN ALL BUT HE HAD LEFT–
LORD! I KNOW YOU.


YOU ARE NONE OTHER THAN HANUMAN. O FAVOURED ONE, LEAD ME TO RAMA.

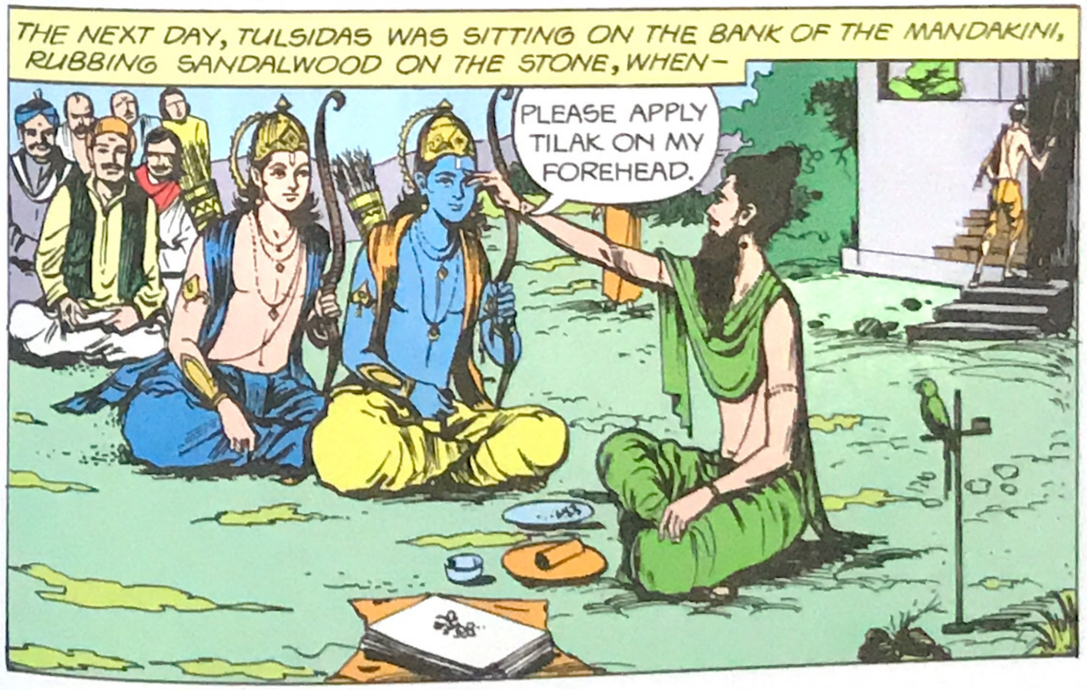

WHEN HE OPENED HIS EYES–
GO TO CHITRAKOOT. YOUR WISH WILL BE FULFILLED.

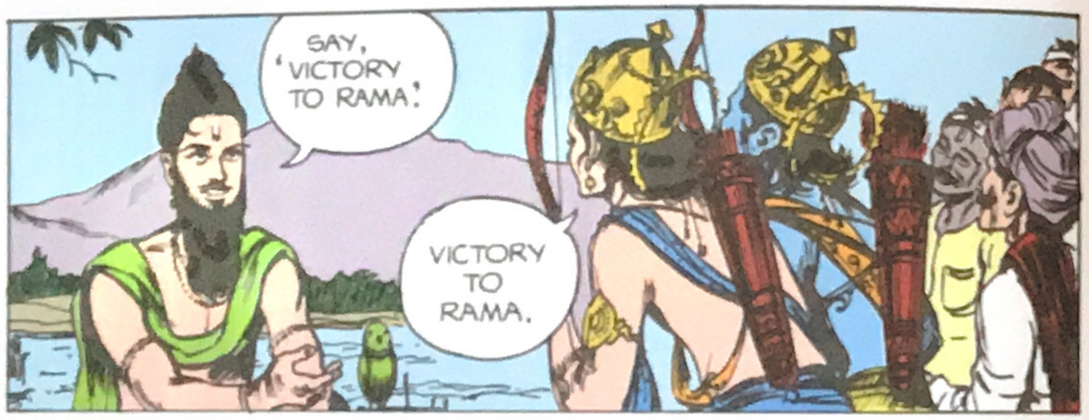

TULSIDAS WANTED TO PROSTRATE AGAIN BEFORE HANUMAN. BUT HE HAD DISAPPEARED.
TULSIDAS PROCEEDED TO CHITRAKOOT.


ONE DAY AT KAMADGIRI, IN CHITRAKOOT–

JUST THEN–
DIDN'T YOU RECOGNISE THEM? THEY WERE RAMA AND LAKSHMANA.

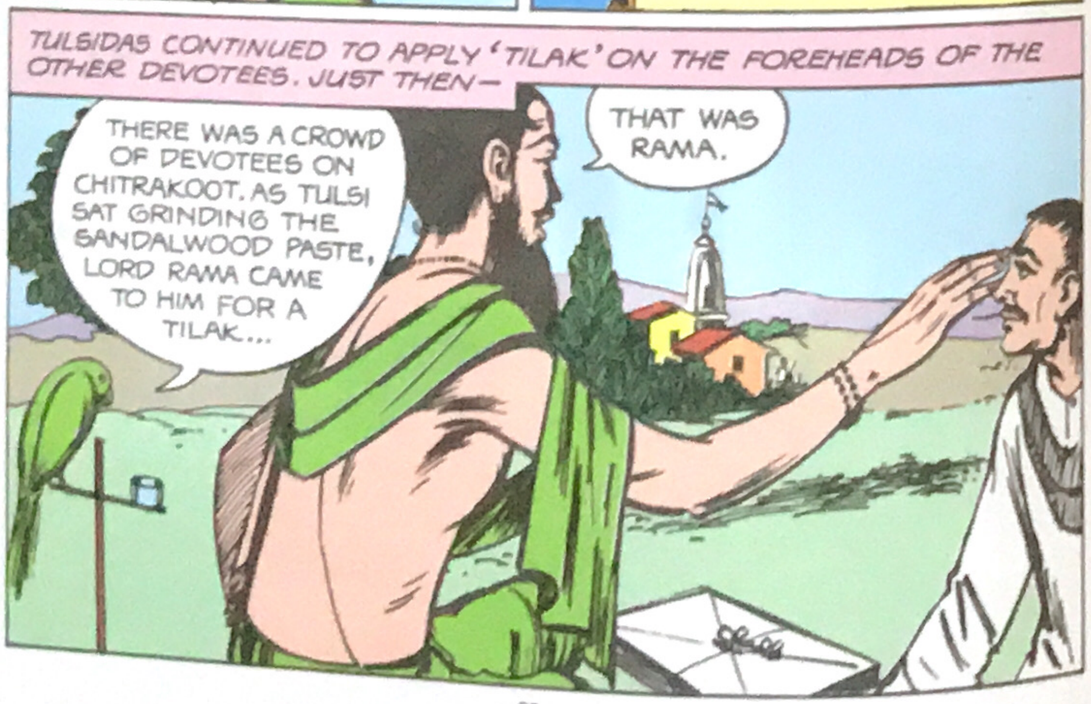
LORD! I BEG OF YOU. LET ME SEE THEM AGAIN.
WELL THEN. TOMORROW ON THE BANK OF THE MANDAKINI.
AND HANUMAN DISAPPEARED.

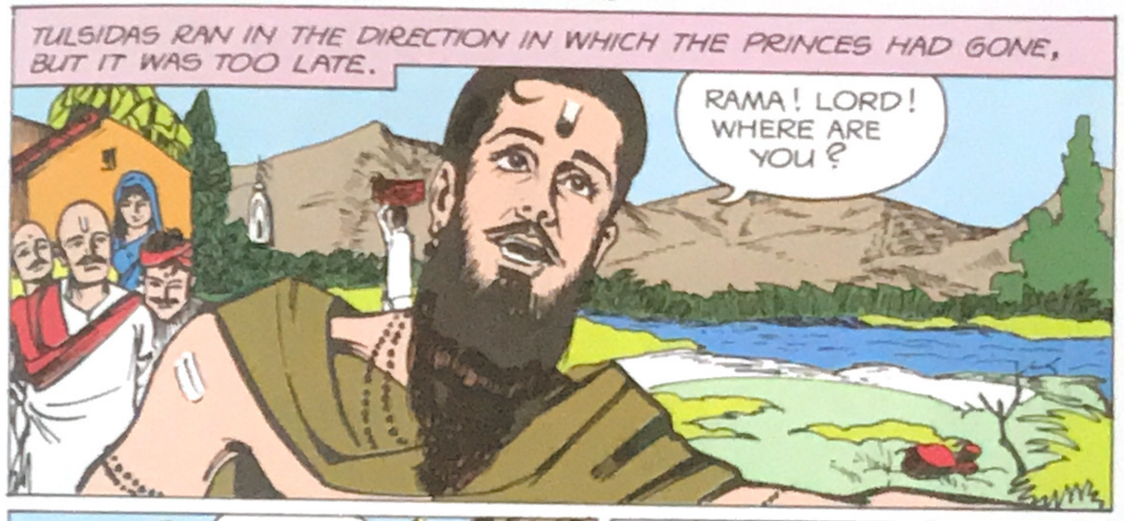

THE NEXT DAY, TULSIDAS WAS SITTING ON THE BANK OF THE MANDAKINI, RUBBING SANDALWOOD ON THE STONE, WHEN–
PLEASE APPLY TILAK ON MY FOREHEAD.


SAY, 'VICTORY TO RAMA.'
VICTORY TO RAMA.

BUT THE SECOND PRINCE HESITATED TO REPEAT THE WORDS OF TULSIDAS.
RAMA WAS GOD INCARNATE ON EARTH. WHY DO YOU HESITATE? SAY, 'VICTORY TO RAMA.'

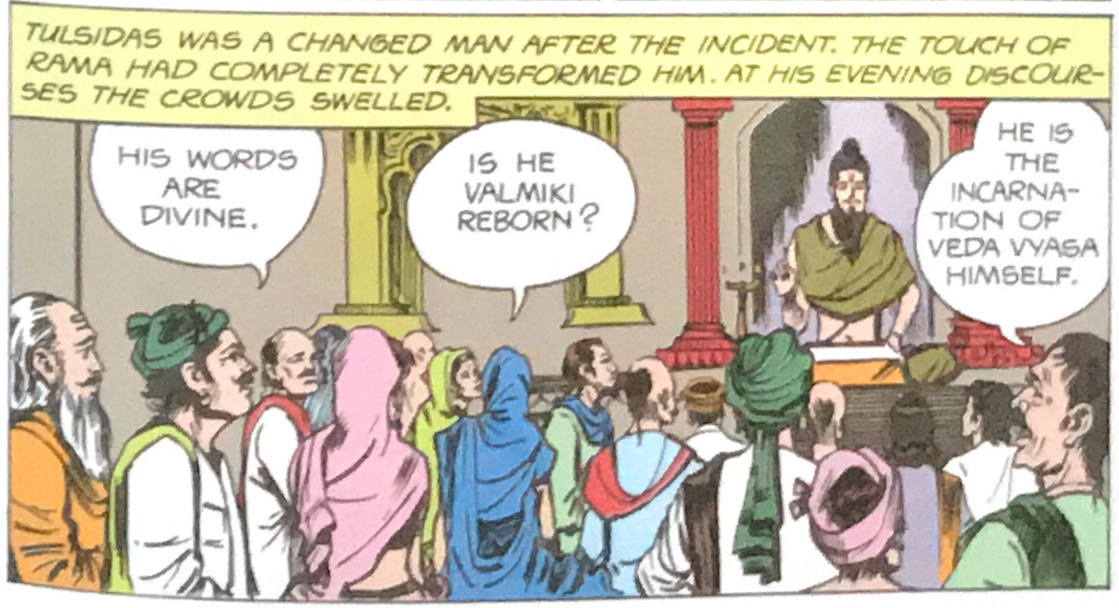
VICTORY TO RAMA.
AND THE PRINCES VANISHED.


TULSIDAS CONTINUED TO APPLY 'TILAK' ON THE FOREHEADS OF THE OTHER DEVOTEES. JUST THEN—
THERE WAS A CROWD OF DEVOTEES ON CHITRAKOOT. AS TULSI SAT GRINDING THE SANDALWOOD PASTE, LORD RAMA CAME TO HIM FOR A TILAK...
THAT WAS RAMA.

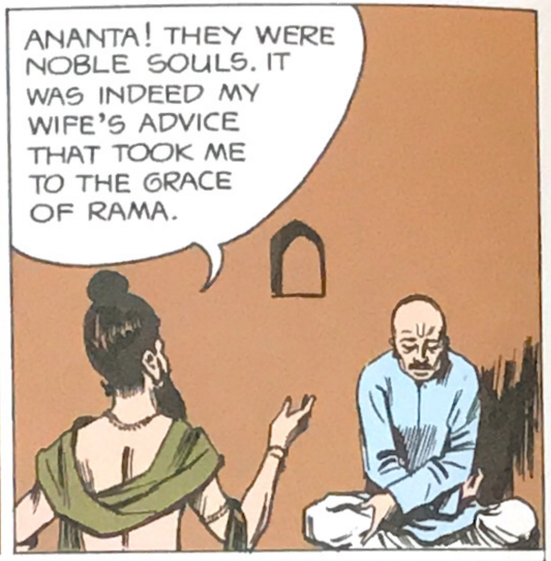

TULSIDAS RAN IN THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THE PRINCES HAD GONE, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE.
RAMA! LORD! WHERE ARE YOU?

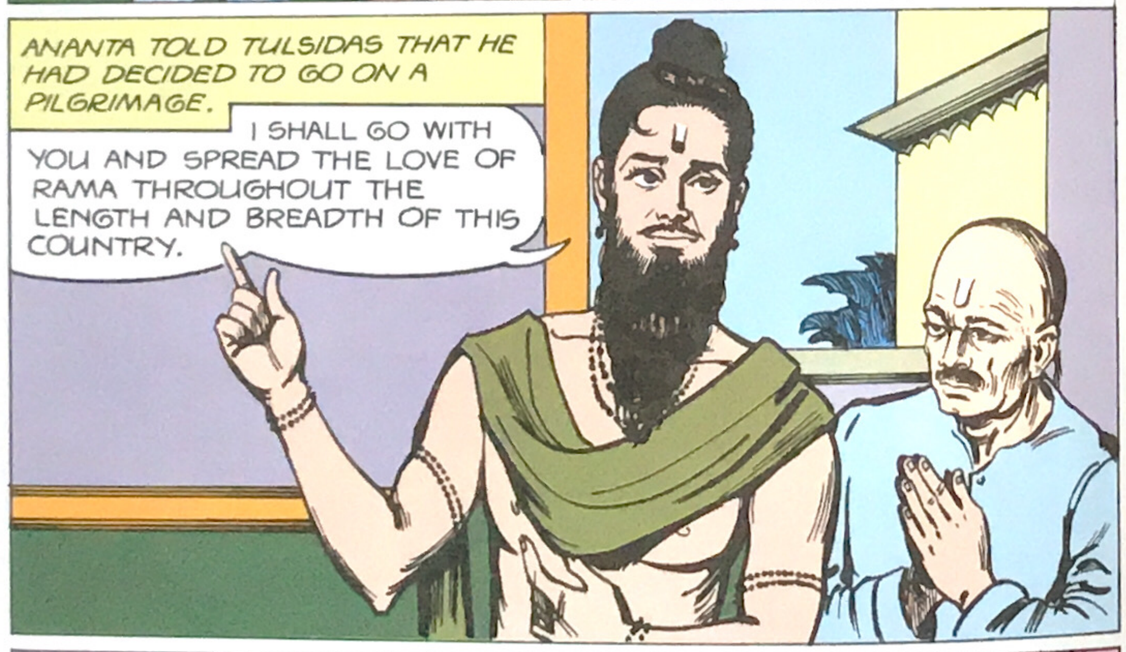
WHERE IS THE PARROT?
IT DISAPPEARED AS SOON AS YOU LEFT.

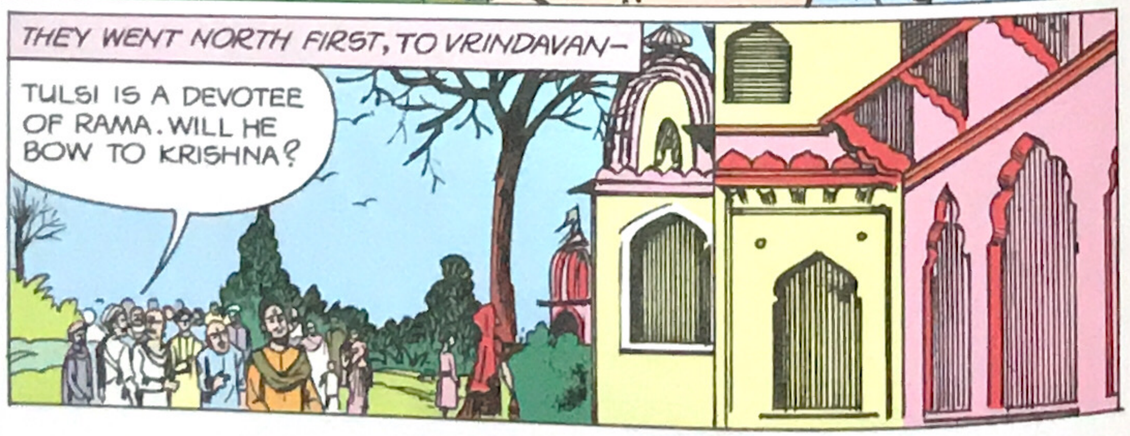
LORD HANUMAN MUST HAVE COME IN THE FORM OF THAT PARROT.

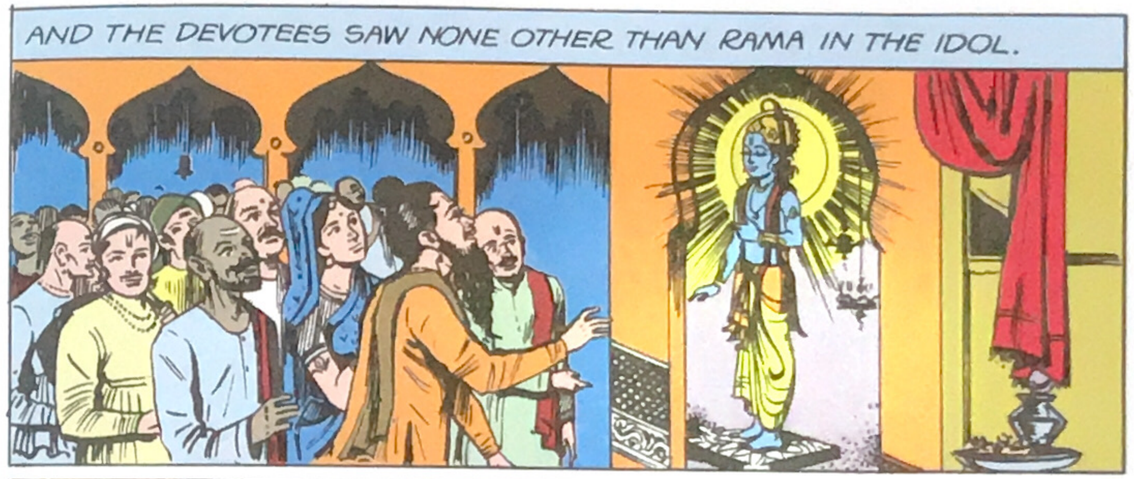

TULSIDAS WAS A CHANGED MAN AFTER THE INCIDENT. THE TOUCH OF RAMA HAD COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED HIM. AT HIS EVENING DISCOURSES THE CROWDS SWELLED.
HIS WORDS ARE DIVINE.
IS HE VALMIKI REBORN?
HE IS THE INCARNATION OF VEDA VYASA HIMSELF.

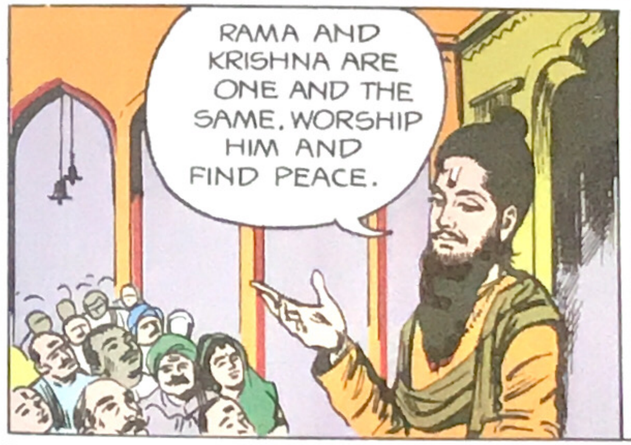
ONE DAY, ANANTA OF BADRI CAME TO HIM.
I HAVE BAD NEWS FOR YOU, SWAMIJI. RATNA AND HER FATHER WERE KILLED WHILE RESCUING SOME PEOPLE FROM THE FLOODED GANGA.

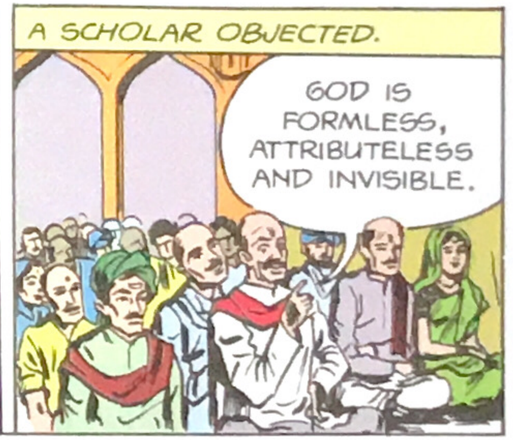

ANANTA! THEY WERE NOBLE SOULS. IT WAS INDEED MY WIFE'S ADVICE THAT TOOK ME TO THE GRACE OF RAMA.

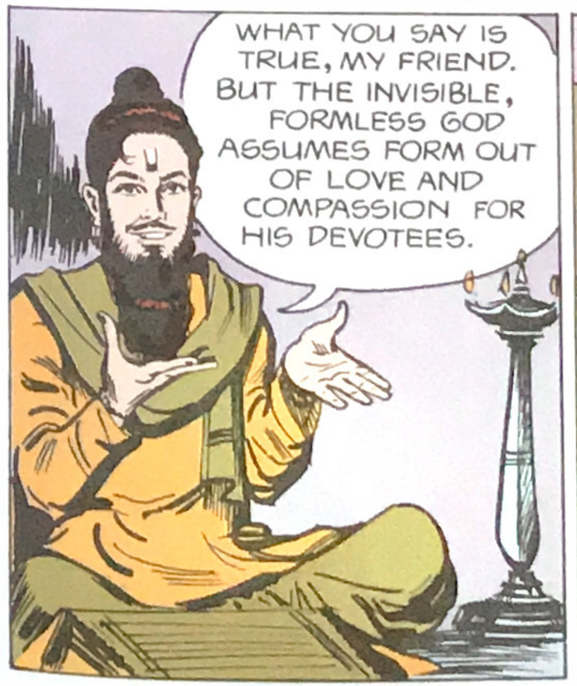

ANANTA TOLD TULSIDAS THAT HE HAD DECIDED TO GO ON A PILGRIMAGE.
I SHALL GO WITH YOU AND SPREAD THE LOVE OF RAMA THROUGHOUT THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THIS COUNTRY.

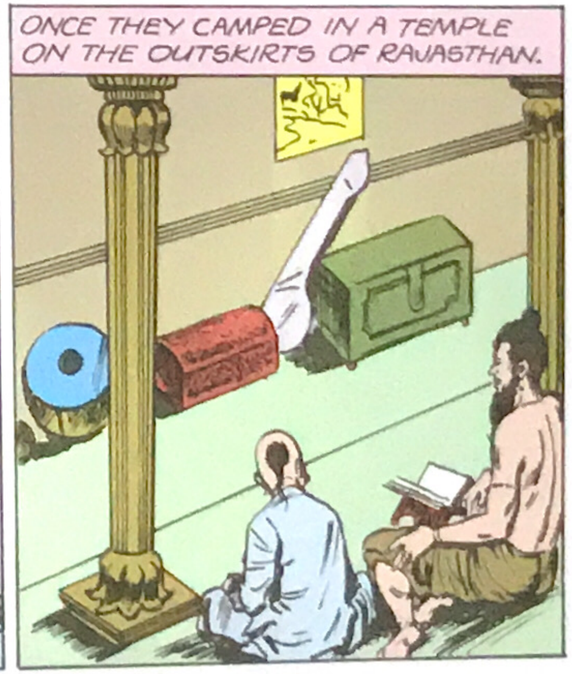

THEY WENT NORTH FIRST, TO VRINDAVAN–
TULSI IS A DEVOTEE OF RAMA. WILL HE BOW TO KRISHNA?

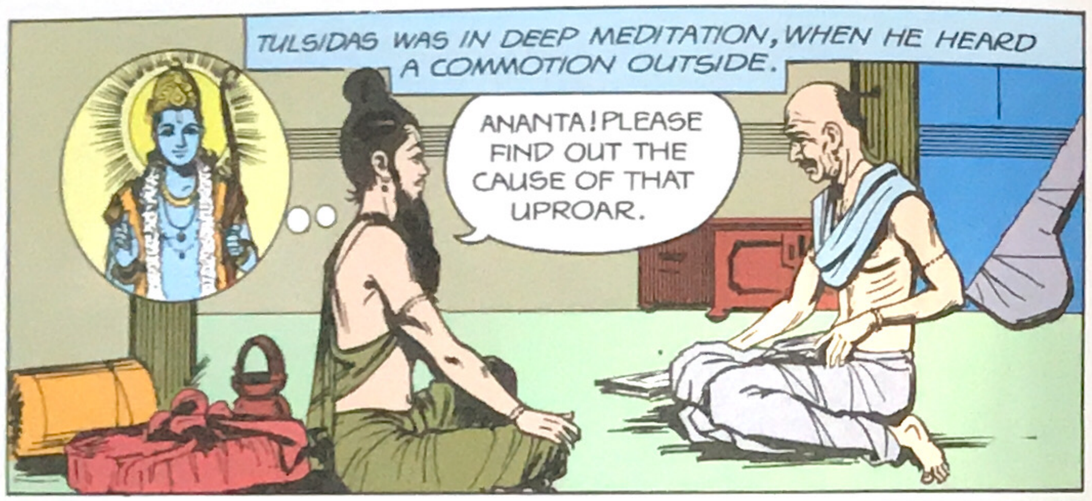

AND THE DEVOTEES SAW NONE OTHER THAN RAMA IN THE IDOL.

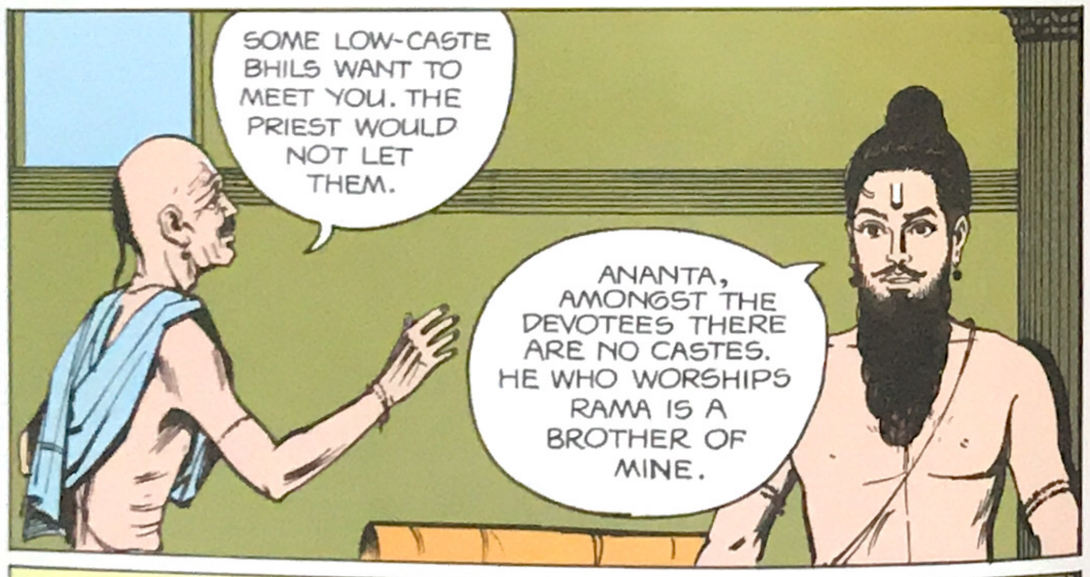

RAMA AND KRISHNA ARE ONE AND THE SAME. WORSHIP HIM AND FIND PEACE.

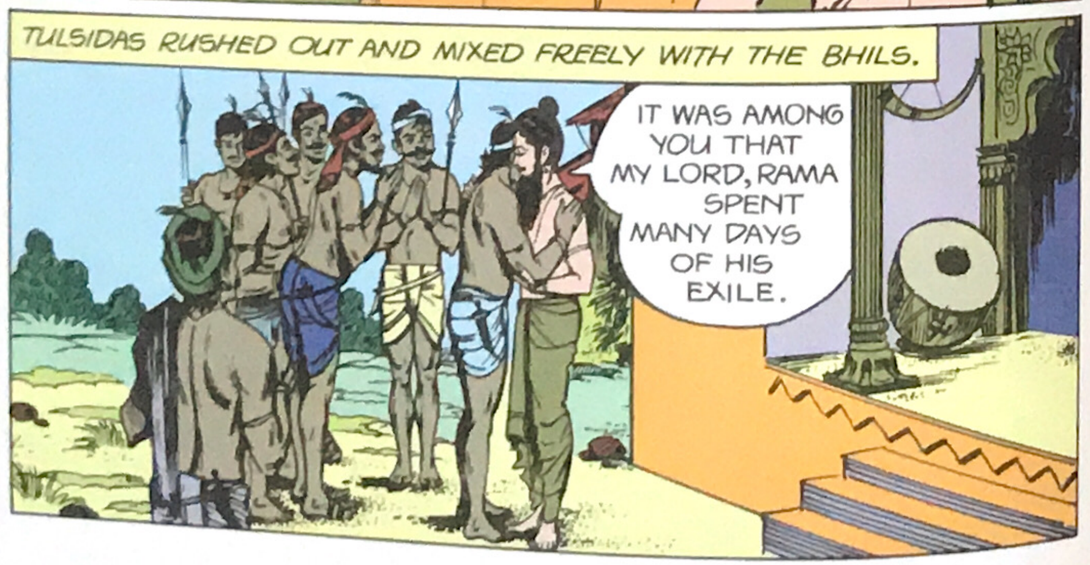

A SCHOLAR OBJECTED.
GOD IS FORMLESS, ATTRIBUTELESS AND INVISIBLE.

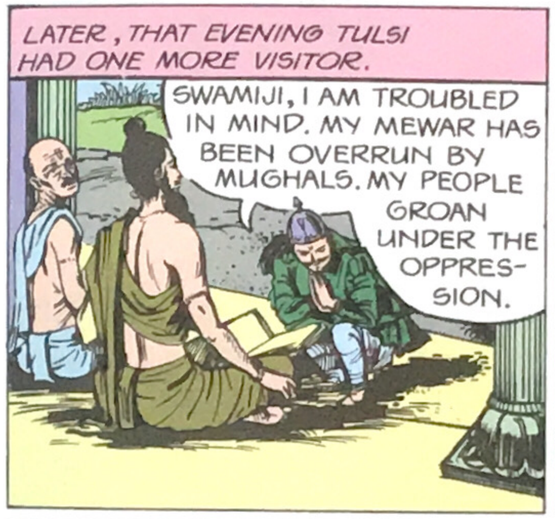

WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, MY FRIEND. BUT THE INVISIBLE, FORMLESS GOD ASSUMES FORM OUT OF LOVE AND COMPASSION FOR HIS DEVOTEES.


ONCE THEY CAMPED IN A TEMPLE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF RAJASTHAN.

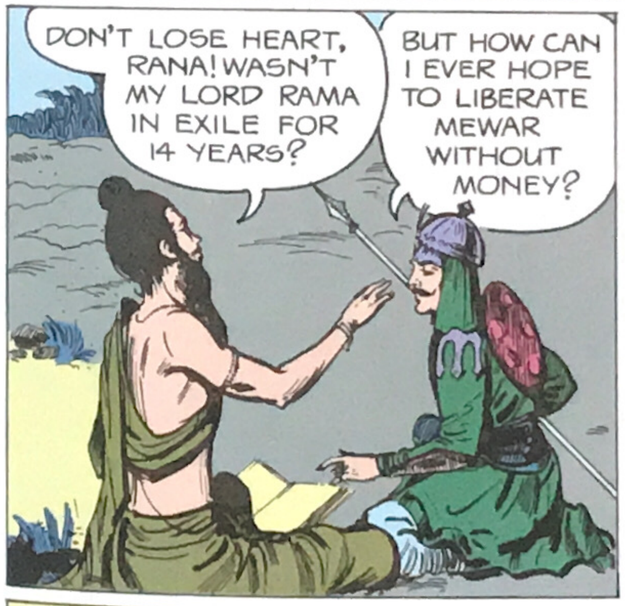

TULSIDAS WAS IN DEEP MEDITATION, WHEN HE HEARD A COMMOTION OUTSIDE.
ANANTA! PLEASE FIND OUT THE CAUSE OF THAT UPROAR.


SOME LOW-CASTE BHILS WANT TO MEET YOU. THE PRIEST WOULD NOT LET THEM.
ANANTA, AMONGST THE DEVOTEES THERE ARE NO CASTES. HE WHO WORSHIPS RAMA IS A BROTHER OF MINE.

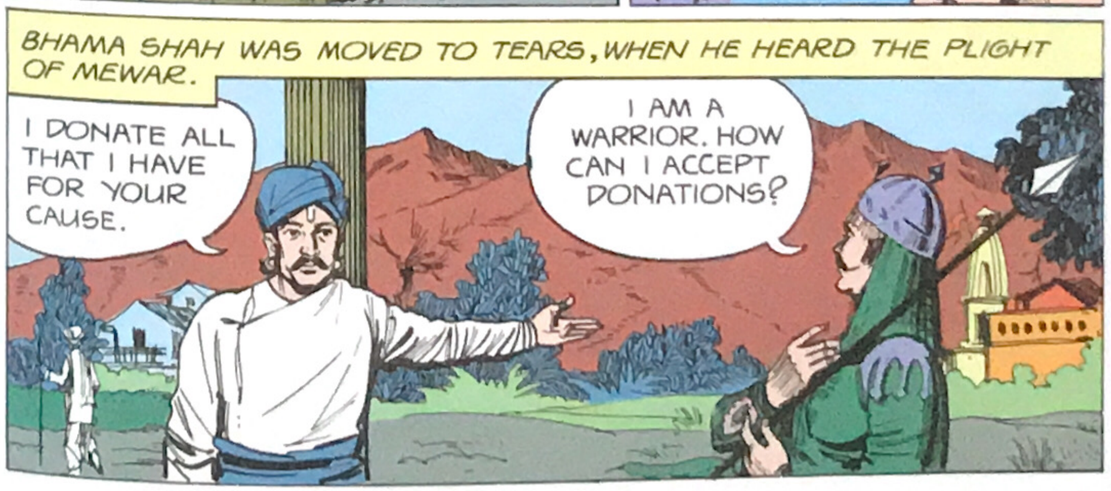

TULSIDAS RUSHED OUT AND MIXED FREELY WITH THE BHILS.
IT WAS AMONG YOU THAT MY LORD, RAMA SPENT MANY DAYS OF HIS EXILE.

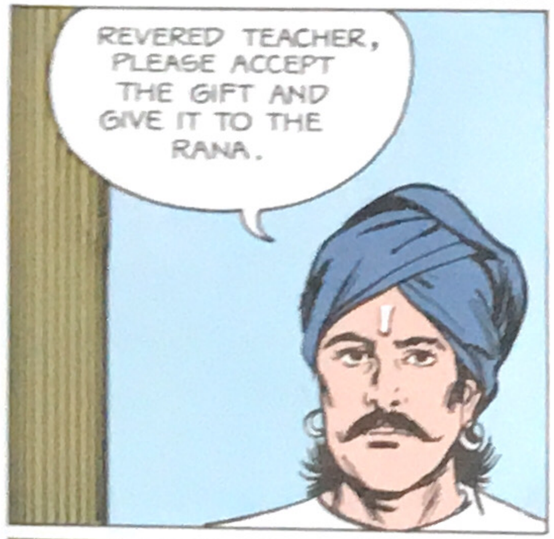

LATER, THAT EVENING TULSI HAD ONE MORE VISITOR.
SWAMIJI, I AM TROUBLED IN MIND. MY MEWAR HAS BEEN OVERRUN BY MUGHALS. MY PEOPLE GROAN UNDER THE OPPRES-SION.

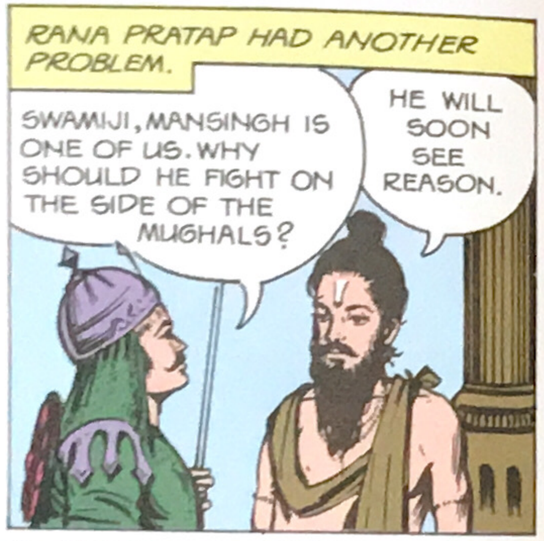
SO LONG AS RANA PRATAP IS ALIVE, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.
I AM THAT UNHAPPY PRATAP.

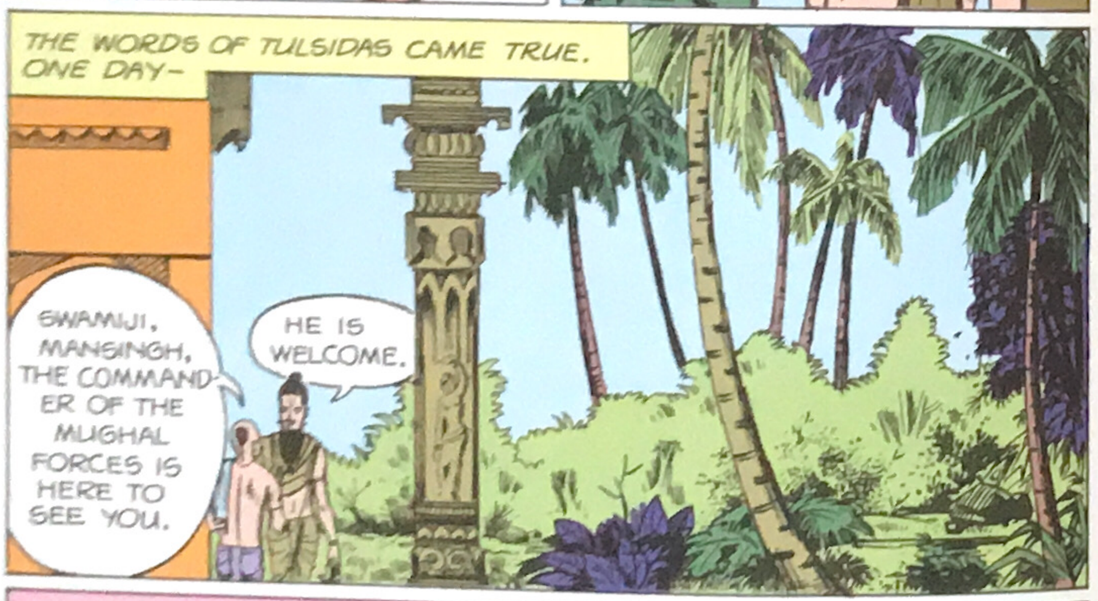

DON'T LOSE HEART, RANA! WASN'T MY LORD RAMA IN EXILE FOR 14 YEARS?
BUT HOW CAN I EVER HOPE TO LIBERATE MEWAR WITHOUT MONEY?

ANANTA CAME IN.
SIR, ONE BHAMA SHAH HAS COME TO SEE YOU.

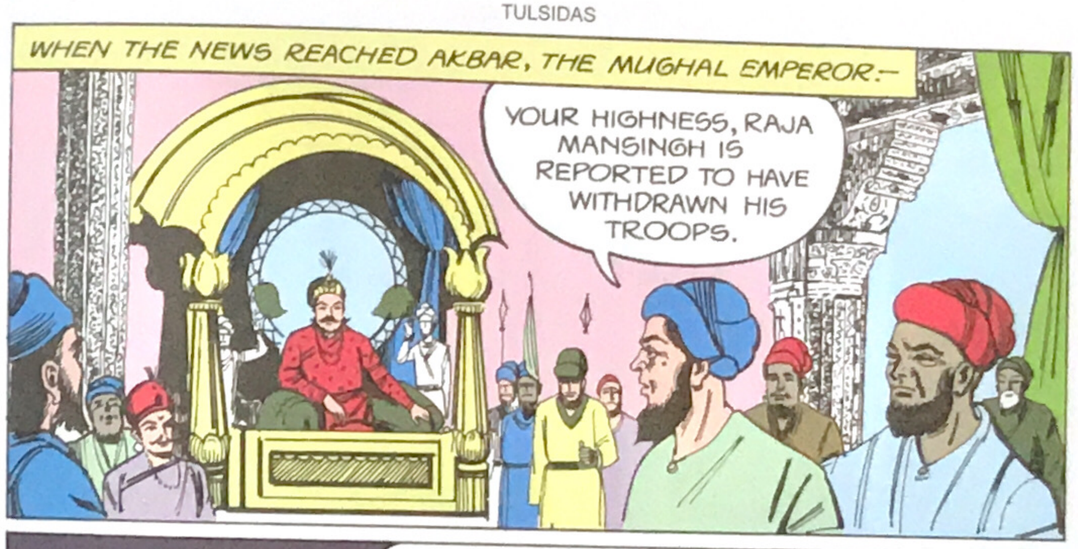

BHAMA SHAH WAS MOVED TO TEARS, WHEN HE HEARD THE PLIGHT OF MEWAR.
I DONATE ALL THAT I HAVE FOR YOUR CAUSE.
I AM A WARRIOR. HOW CAN I ACCEPT DONATIONS?

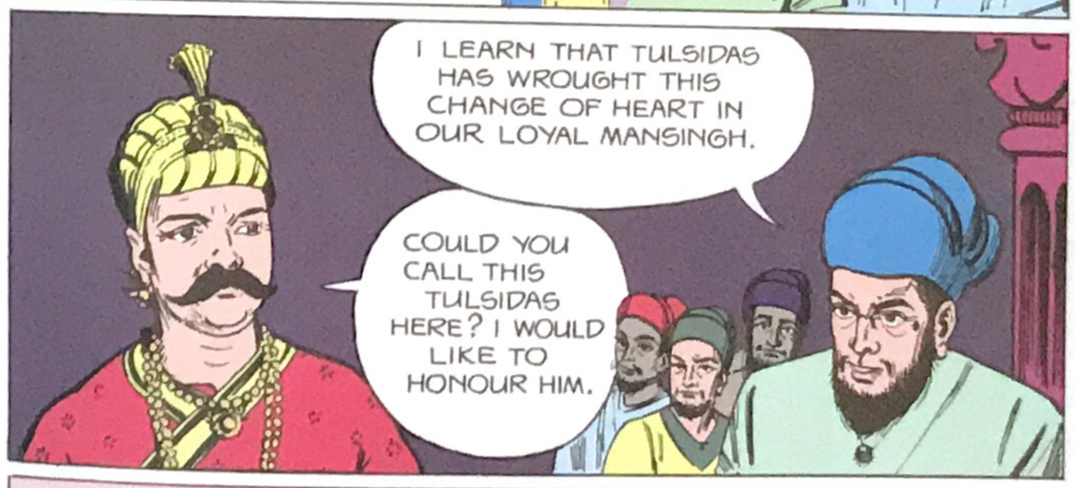

REVERED TEACHER, PLEASE ACCEPT THE GIFT AND GIVE IT TO THE RANA.

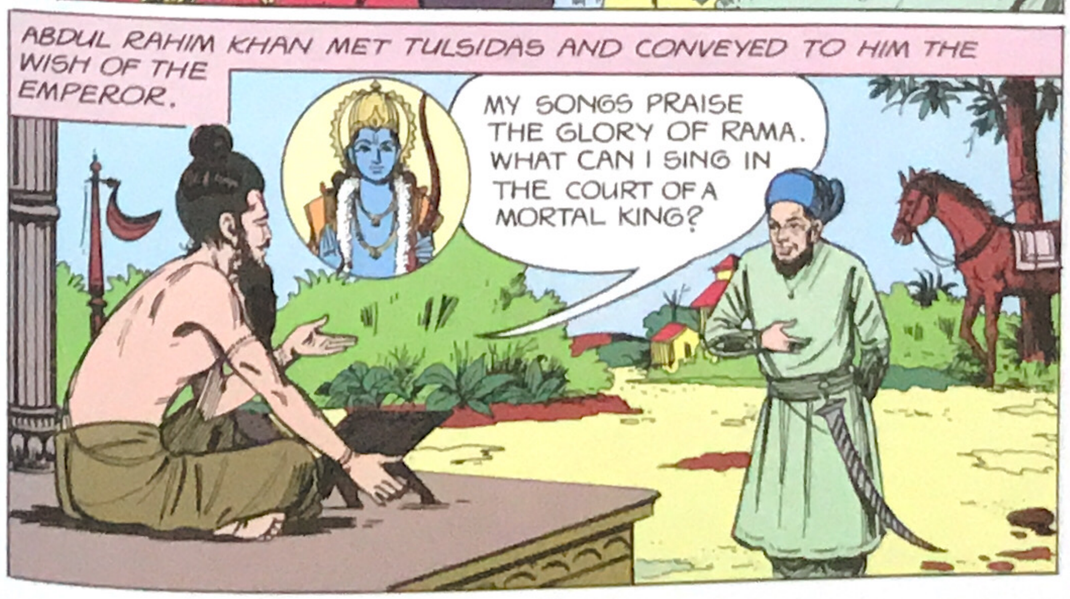

RANA PRATAP HAD ANOTHER PROBLEM.
SWAMIJI, MANSINGH IS ONE OF US. WHY SHOULD HE FIGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE MUGHALS?
HE WILL SOON SEE REASON.


THE WORDS OF TULSIDAS CAME TRUE. ONE DAY–
SWAMIJI, MANSINGH, THE COMMANDER OF THE MUGHAL FORCES IS HERE TO SEE YOU.
HE IS WELCOME.

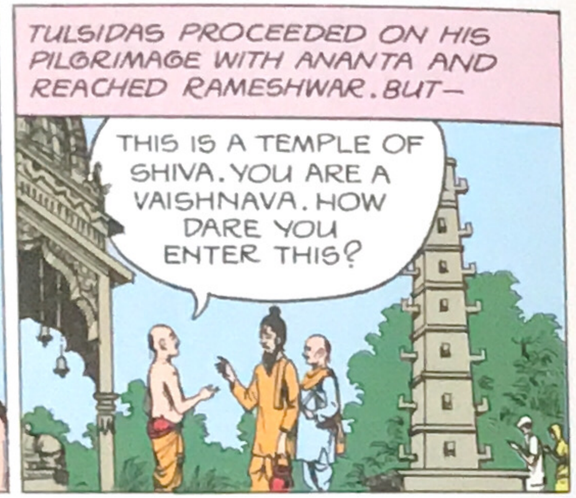
MANSINGH WAS DEEPLY IMPRESSED BY THE WORDS OF TULSIDAS.
IF YOU SO WISH, I WILL NEVER TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST RANA PRATAP.


WHEN THE NEWS REACHED AKBAR, THE MUGHAL EMPEROR:–
YOUR HIGHNESS, RAJA MANSINGH IS REPORTED TO HAVE WITHDRAWN HIS TROOPS.

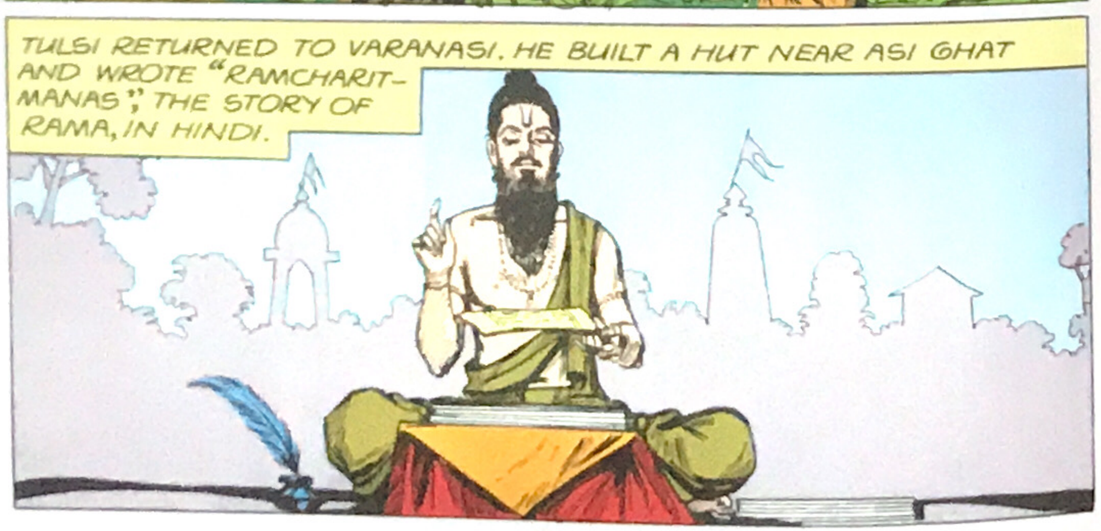

I LEARN THAT TULSIDAS HAS WROUGHT THIS CHANGE OF HEART IN OUR LOYAL MANSINGH.
COULD YOU CALL THIS TULSIDAS HERE? I WOULD LIKE TO HONOUR HIM.

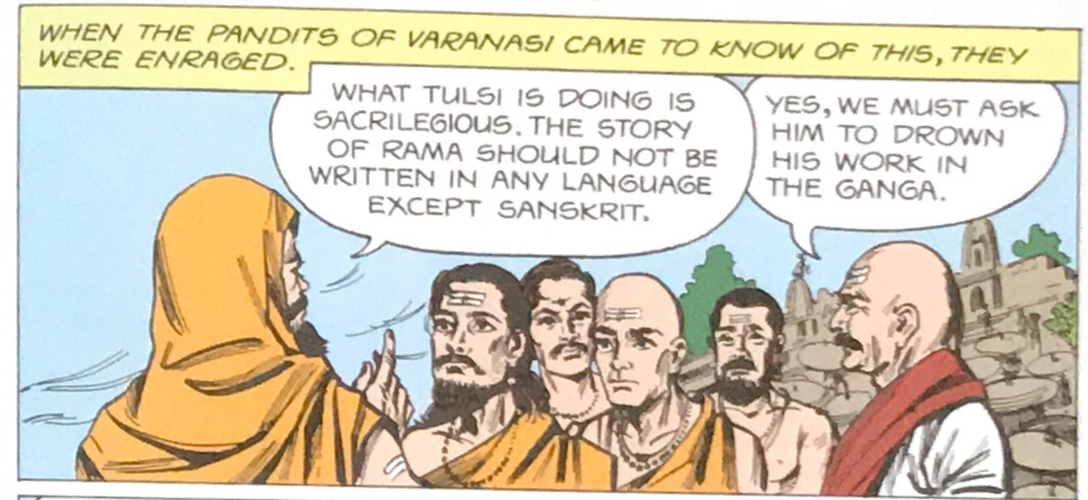

ABDUL RAHIM KHAN MET TULSIDAS AND CONVEYED TO HIM THE WISH OF THE EMPEROR.
MY SONGS PRAISE THE GLORY OF RAMA. WHAT CAN I SING IN THE COURT OF A MORTAL KING?

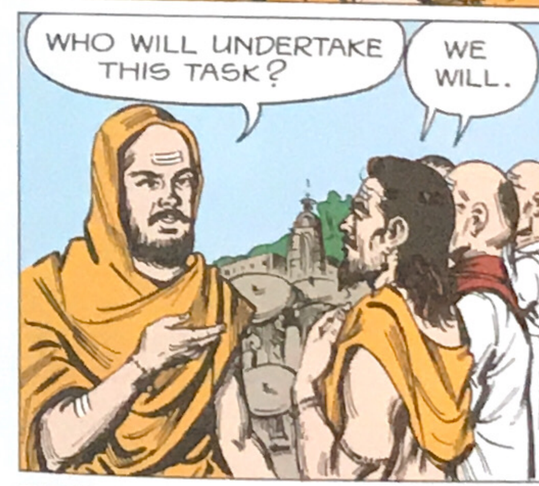
THEY SAY, YOU PREACH HATRED OF ISLAM.
CERTAINLY NOT. I SING OF RAMA MY SAVIOUR, ALL THE TIME.


TULSIDAS PROCEEDED ON HIS PILGRIMAGE WITH ANANTA AND REACHED RAMESHWAR. BUT—
THIS IS A TEMPLE OF SHIVA. YOU ARE A VAISHNAVA. HOW DARE YOU ENTER THIS?

TULSIDAS SAT OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE AND PRAYED TO LORD SHIVA. SOON—
I AM PLEASED WITH YOU, TULSI. RETURN TO VARANASI AND FULFIL THE MISSION OF YOUR LIFE.

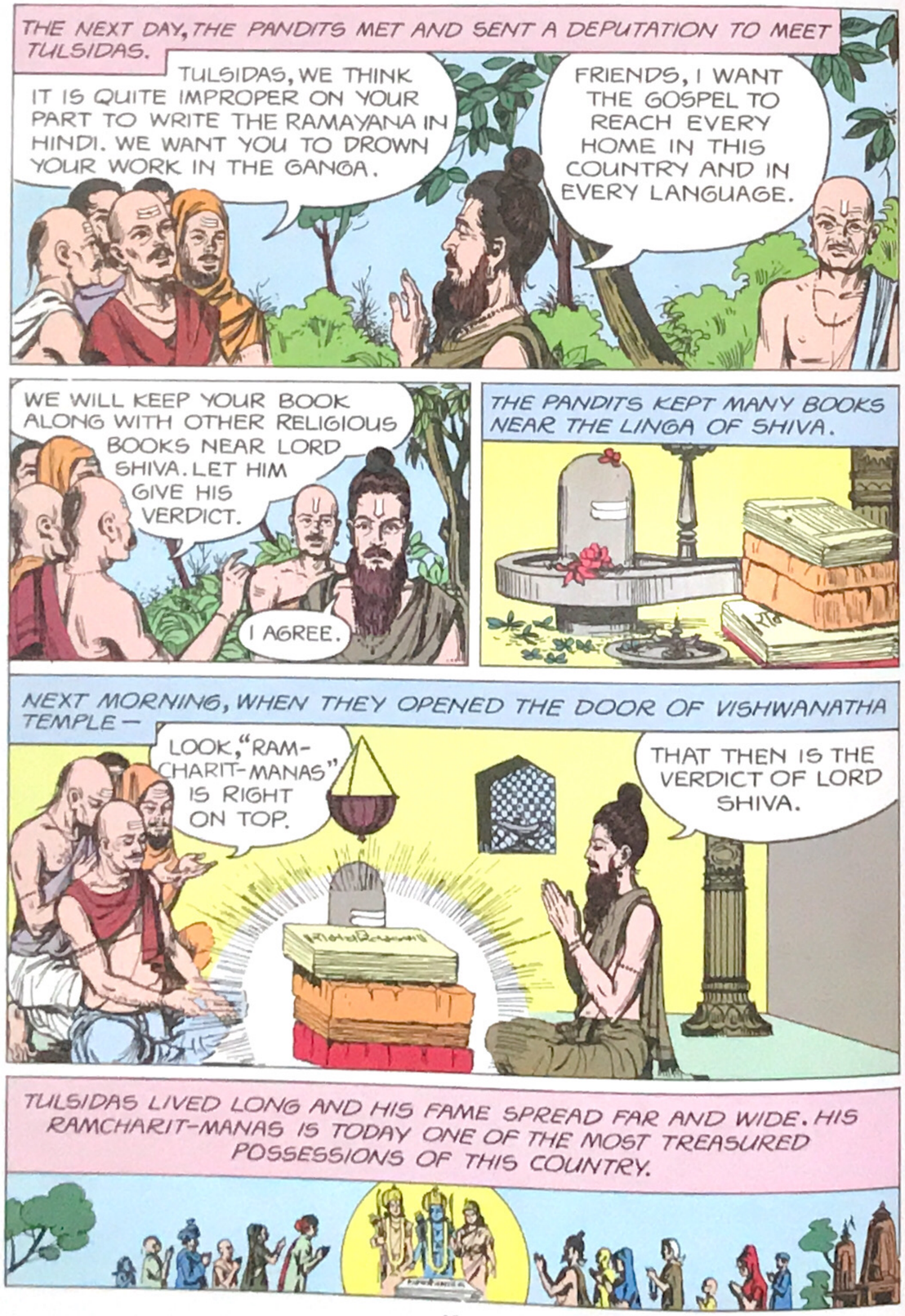

TULSI RETURNED TO VARANASI. HE BUILT A HUT NEAR ASI GHAT AND WROTE "RAMCHARIT-MANAS", THE STORY OF RAMA, IN HINDI.


WHEN THE PANDITS OF VARANASI CAME TO KNOW OF THIS, THEY WERE ENRAGED.
WHAT TULSI IS DOING IS SACRILEGIOUS. THE STORY OF RAMA SHOULD NOT BE WRITTEN IN ANY LANGUAGE EXCEPT SANSKRIT.
YES, WE MUST ASK HIM TO DROWN HIS WORK IN THE GANGA.


WHO WILL UNDERTAKE THIS TASK?
WE WILL.

THAT NIGHT THE TWO STEALTHILY APPROACHED THE HUT OF TULSIDAS.
LOOK! WHO KEEPS WATCH THERE?

IT IS RAMA AND LAKSHMANA. RUN! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE.



WHICH OF THE ACKs HAVE YOU STILL NOT READ?

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